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The World's Oldest Science Fiction Magazine

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STORIES



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William F. Wu
Barry N. Malzberg
and
Jack Dann

James Morrow
Kevin J. Anderson
and
Doug Beason

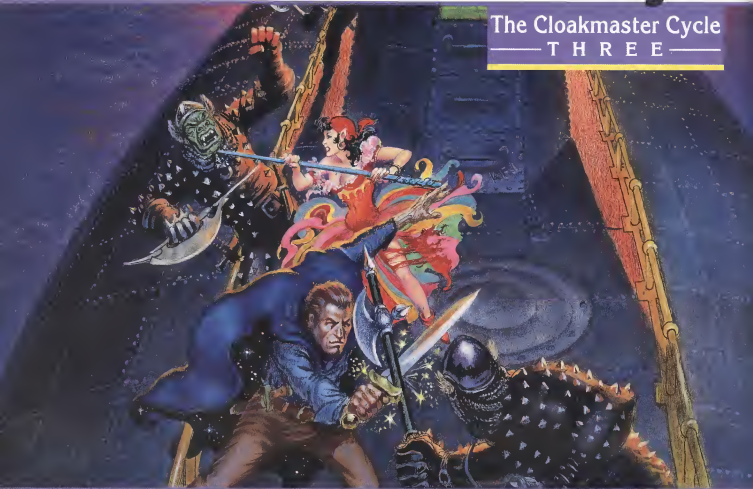
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One Hundred Fourteen Thousand Words

Kim Mohan

This is the twelfth issue of AMAZING® Stories in our big, slick, colorful format—and it's high time we gave credit to the people who are responsible for the "colorful" part.

Oh, sure, they've gotten credit, but a line of type starting with "Illustration by" or "Cover art by" doesn't begin to hint at the contributions that fifty-seven different artists have made to the publication you're reading.

A good way to describe what our illustrators have done for this magazine is to summarize the way we operate when we arrange for someone to provide us with a piece of artwork. I've been told that we do things somewhat differently from a lot of other publishers, because we don't really have an art director. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that we've had fifty-seven art directors during the last year. When we commission an illustration, generally the only decisions we make are which artist's phone number to call and (for interior illustrations) which story to send to that artist.

The artwork you've seen in this magazine represents not only the physical ability but also the imaginative ability of each illustrator. We send someone a story and we ask for a painting that he or she thinks is the best possible way to illustrate that story. The artist reads the story, comes up with an idea, and executes that idea. We studiously avoid getting involved in the creative process, except for *maybe* a little bit of nosiness when we see a rough

sketch. We don't tinker with the basic idea behind a painting, though; what you see is the creation of the illustrator, in every sense of the word.

We've dealt with quite a few people who get much of their work from book publishers and users of commercial art. Those artists are accustomed to dealing with art directors, and to being told what a painting should look like before they even pick up a brush. (I'll never forget the story one person told me about being commissioned for a book cover that was supposed to be a scene depicting the surface of Mars—with the Earth visible in the nighttime sky overhead!) For some of them, our open-ended way of operating took a little getting used to; they enjoyed having the freedom to create any image they wanted, but at the same time they were a little gunshy about how to handle that sort of challenge. Well, they need not have worried. I remember talking to a number of people who weren't totally comfortable with having complete freedom of creation, but I don't remember a single case when one of them turned in a painting that wasn't perfect for the story.

Whether they're accustomed to the freedom or not, one quality that all our illustrators have in common is the desire to do the best job they can possibly do. I've never seen a piece of work that I thought had been composed hastily or frivolously. In fact, to judge by a few examples I know of, quite the opposite is

true. For instance, one artist finished a cover painting, paid to have it photographed as a color transparency, and sent it in. It looked fine to me—but the day after the transparency got here, he called to say that he had done some "fixing" and was going to send a new transparency. Okay . . . and then before the second version even arrived, he called again to say he had touched it up some more. So we ended up printing transparency number three—which as far as I could see was no different from transparency number two. But it *was* different, and better, in the eyes of the person who painted it, and that's what matters.

In these last twelve issues we've used one hundred fourteen pieces of original art—coincidentally, exactly double the number of artists who have created that work. If every picture really is worth what they say it is . . . well, that's where the title of this bit of writing came from.

We Meant To Do It Dept.: This issue marks the 66th anniversary of the first issue of the magazine in April 1926, and thus is designated as Volume 67, Number 1. This means that Volume 66, which began with the first new-format magazine in May 1991, has only eleven issues instead of the customary year's worth. Now our numbering is back in synch with the way the issues were designated when the magazine was born, and from now on the volume years will run from April through March. ♦

Reflections

Robert Silverberg

In recent years I've been reassembling the books I loved in my childhood some fifty years ago—an enterprise born not simply of nostalgia but from deep curiosity about the narrative material that went into the forming of Robert Silverberg, writer. For surely what we read in childhood makes the strongest impressions on us, leaving ineradicable imprints that, so I believe, recur in the work of any creative artist throughout his life. And now, with hundreds of stories and an uncountable number of books behind me, I'm trying to learn something about the source from which that seemingly inexhaustible flow of narrative has come.

So I've been prowling the rare-book dealers, and consulting catalogs, and cudgeling my own memory to try to reconstruct my reading preferences of the late 1930's and early 1940's. A ferociously retentive person like me would be expected to have the books of his childhood still on hand, I suppose, but in fact many of them were books I never owned in the first place, because I was such a dedicated user of the Brooklyn Public Library. (When I returned to Brooklyn a few years ago I revisited my ancient library branch, naively thinking some of those books would still be on the shelves, but of course they had been read to tatters long ago and replaced by the favorites of a newer generation.) As for the books I did own, some are still in my possession but most were destroyed in the fire that swept

through my house in 1968. I made notes at the time on what was lost (and in some instances kept the charred copies) and that has helped me greatly in this job of reclaiming the past.

I'm not talking, incidentally, of the standard children's books that everyone in my era read—*Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking Glass*, *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare*, *Peter Pan*, *Just So Stories*, *The Arabian Nights*, and such. I read all of those, of course—read them dozens of times—but what I've been looking for are the more esoteric things, the ones that went particularly into the shaping of the science-fiction writer that I was to become.

In fact I should have become a fantasy writer, I guess, because what particularly preoccupied me in those early years were books of myths and legends. I have some of them on the desk before me now: Padraic Colum's *The Children of Odin*, a retelling of the Norse myths, and an obscure little pamphlet called *The Heroes of Asgard* by A. and E. Keary dealing with the same body of material (my original copy, water-stained but intact) and Colum's *The Adventures of Odysseus and the Tale of Troy*. And also, a really esoteric one, Helen Zimmern's *The Epic of Kings*, which draws on the great Persian epic of Firdausi, and which after years of searching I have only recently managed to find again. How they filled my mind with wonders, those books!

Loki and the Fenris wolf, Audhumla the primordial cow, Odin at Mimir's well, the tale of the Volsungs, of Sohrab and Rustem, of the injudicious Kai Kaous and the noble Kai Khosrau, the death of Achilles, the wanderings of Odysseus—I dreamed of them, I embroidered on their plots in my mind, I longed to enter their world in actuality. Images from those Norse and Greek myths still course vividly through my mind and I can find their correlatives in my own writing; but I have transmuted them all to science fiction instead of producing new adventures of the Aesir or the heroes of Troy. Most likely the primary reason for that is that I came to maturity at a time when fantasy was an unpublishable category and science fiction a thriving and expanding operation, and I wanted what I wrote to see print.

But there is another reason. I was exposed at the same early age to the s-f virus, which had the same mythic power for me, and which, apparently, affected me even more deeply.

For instance, here is my copy of *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll*, the Modern Library edition, which I see from my father's inscription was given to me when I was not quite eight years old. The first 271 pages of this 1293-page volume are given over, of course, to the two Alice novels, which show signs of having been read and read and read. But the trail of fingerprints and eyetracks indicates that I went right on to the next two novels, *Sylvie and Bruno*

and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, books that no one else I know has ever mentioned reading. I don't know what category they fall into: not quite fantasy, not really science fiction; but there is a weird logic to them that makes them seem almost like parallel-world stories, since they take place in a sort-of England, but not any England we would recognize. What Lewis Carroll achieved in these two little-known books was a variation on the free play of fantasy that we see in *Alice or Looking Glass*, but it is a down-to-earth fantasy that has more resonance with science fiction. Beyond them in the huge volume is "The Hunting of the Snark," and some other poems, and then, in the back, an astonishing bunch of conundrums in logic and other mystifications that had a profound effect on my childish mind although I was unable even to begin understanding what their author was talking about. It was Lewis Carroll's rigorous, orderly, and logical exploration of the utterly incomprehensible, I think, that helped me to understand what science fiction (as opposed to fantasy) is all about.

A couple of other discoveries about the same time pushed me toward science fiction. The Buck Rogers comic strip, for one—I dimly remember a Sunday page, circa 1941, in which aliens with red puckered faces came swarming over a sea-wall while Buck and his companions tried to push them back. And then, in 1942, *Planet Comics*—embodying a glorious vision of the spectacular interplanetary future that left me hungry for more of the same, and led me on and on until at last by the age of ten I had found H. G. Wells and Jules Verne and my destiny was set in stone forever. (I tried, a couple of years ago while attending a convention of comic-book collectors, to find the issue of *Planet* that had so spun my mind into orbit. I was willing to pay the staggering

sum being asked for issues of that vintage. But I couldn't seem to recognize, in the crudely drawn pages of the issues I saw, the particular splendors that had illuminated my mind nearly half a century before. Perhaps the ink had faded; or perhaps I was looking at the wrong issue.

Here is another book of my childhood that sent me in still another direction as a writer: Walter de la Mare's marvelous fantasy *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, a curious tale of the adventures of three highly intelligent monkeys who set out across the heart of a fantastic Africa to find the golden land from which their father had come. (It's a wonderful book, and I say so not merely because I see it through the eyes of the child who loved it; I reread it yet again a few months ago and was as profoundly moved by its beauty and mystery as I had been when I was nine.) Images out of that remarkable book have been turning up in my own science-fiction books for decades; I usually recognize them for what they are after the fact, and smile, and leave them there as an homage. There are passages in my newest novel, *Kingdoms of the Wall*, that owe their power to my decades-old recollections of *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*. So be it. No writer invents everything from scratch; our imaginations are billion-piece mosaics fashioned from everything we have ever experienced, including all that we have ever read. But also de la Mare led me circuitously to write an immense historical novel; for his monkeys encountered, midway through their jungle odyssey, a stranded Englishman named Andrew Battell, with whom they become involved for two or three chapters. About 1965 I discovered quite by accident that Andrew Battell had really lived; and, stumbling upon the text of Battell's own journal, which surely de la Mare had used in writing his

novel, I resolved to retell his story myself, and eventually did so in my novel *Lord of Darkness*, which is nothing else than my imagined version of Andrew Battell's autobiography. I tip my hat to Walter de la Mare again and again throughout its 559 pages, but only someone who has read *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* would know that, and I have never met anyone else who has.

I am pleasantly aware, as I forage through the reconstituted library of my childhood, that books I have written are part of other people's stores of images and recollections. Again and again I hear that someone's first novel was one of my early books for young readers—*Revolt on Alpha C*, say, or *Lost Race of Mars*. So the cycle goes round and round. We read, we absorb, we transmute, and we offer new stories for new readers, who will eventually recycle our own work into tales for the readers of generations to follow.

In darker moments I wonder whether today's young readers—brought up on *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* instead of *Heroes of Asgard* and *The Children of Odin*—will produce fables and fantasies of their own with any value whatever. Garbage in, garbage out, as they say. But I want to think that I'm wrong: that the myth-making function of mankind is eternal, and that there will always be powerful new stories growing out of powerful ancient ones, no matter what debasements of popular culture may thrive in the marketplace. In any case, it's not my problem. I won't be around to see what the writers born in 1985 will be writing forty years from now. And if I don't care for what has been produced in the interim, well, I can always go back and reread *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* or *Sylvie and Bruno* or *The Epic of Kings* one more time. ♦

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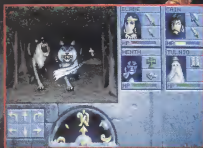
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Letters

Brian Stableford's "Complications," in the February issue, was an unusually interesting and profound story. It was, biologists surely realize, based on Charles Darwin's seminal research and publications on the pedunculate genus of Cirripedes—better known as barnacles.

In *Origin of Species* Darwin noted that "Cuvier did not perceive that a barnacle was a crustacean" and then went on, studying barnacles in a saltwater aquarium in his home, to discover that male barnacles were microscopic swimmers living inside the macroscopic females. Darwin's son, visiting a neighbor, asked, "And where does your father keep his barnacles?"

Stableford's story; "The Long Fall" by Ben Bova (December 1991); the outstanding science articles by my Caltech classmate Stephen L. Gillett; and Bob Silverberg's essays on *Voyager* (September 1991)—the spacecraft on which I was Mission Planning Engineer—and on NGC6240 (August 1991) show that AMAZING Stories can be more than just a fantasy magazine. You have an element of genuine science fiction.

About NGC6240: my physicist wife and I wrote a novella presuming that the mysterious central mass consists of 10^{14} artificially manufactured planets, populated by a "mole of sentients" (Avogadro's number, roughly 6×10^{23}).

Also, since you have work by significant SF poets such as L. Sprague de Camp, Robert Frazier and W. Gregory Stewart (June 1991), and a review of Terry Garcey's anthology (December 1991), why not have an SF poem in every issue?

Jonathan V. Post
Altadena CA

I began reading AMAZING Stories shortly before the format change. I enjoy the new format much more than the old save for a single element: whatever happened to the poetry? I was very disap-

pointed when I discovered that the new magazine no longer contained the poetry that I had enjoyed so much.

Why not shorten the book reviews and add some poems? I'm sure that I am not the only one who shares this sentiment.

Jeffrey Shelton
Roanoke VA

Several factors played a part in our decision to discontinue the use of poetry when the magazine underwent its change in format. Rather than trying to tackle the subject on this page, I'll use page 4 in next month's issue to answer the questions posed by Jonathan and Jeffrey. Fair enough?

My enjoyment of the second installment of "The Amazing Story" by Mike Ashley in the February issue was soured by the slanderous comment in the fifth paragraph concerning *Doctor Who*. This slur was completely unnecessary.

Scott Jarrett
Labeland FL

Following Mr. Silverberg's example in his column ("Reflections," January 1992), I hereby state that I am a confirmed, "biologically destined" heterosexual—and that my understanding of gays is probably as deep as his own. That said, I think he made a slight boo-boo. I quote: "But if it is, rather, something that is hard-wired into the genetic mix—the way skin color is, or height, or physical agility—then surely it would be reprehensible to condemn people for behaving the way they were designed by nature to behave."

If we assume for a moment that Dr. LeVay's study pans out as absolute fact, and that all homosexual behavior can be traced back to the hypothalamus nucle-

us, then this would mean that homosexual preference would have to be reclassified as being within the range of "human norm." This would only be fair if you apply the phrase "designed by nature." But later in the column he stated the following:

"Heterosexuality is the biological norm—not just for humans but for most animals—and the continuation of the species depends on it, at least so far."

There's the rub. As I said, my understanding of gays is by no means far-reaching, but this I do know: the population of gays and bisexuals worldwide isn't exactly an insignificant number. And homosexual behavior more than likely predates recorded history. So, if homosexuality is a genetic result, then gays are as normal as heterosexuals. If one can't condemn another for being what he, she, or it is by nature, be it white, Asian, black, or gay, then you cannot state that being white, Asian, black, or heterosexual is the norm. It's ad hoc.

I hope this doesn't sound like I'm berating Mr. Silverberg—I'm not. I admit I might have misunderstood the context in which he made the two statements, but they simply struck me as too discordant. Besides which, we are assuming a lot—as he said, the data is very inconclusive.

Martin A. Koller
West Islip NY

I enjoy the new format of your magazine immensely. I especially like the book reviews, although the excerpts don't really do much for me. (If they are a source of income for the magazine, though, by all means keep them.) I was glad to see that you kept Bob Silverberg's opinion column—it's always the first part of the magazine I read. In fact, anything by Silverberg is always the first part of any magazine I read.

Arthur P. Bollmann
Brooklyn NY

MISSING PERSON



William F. Wu

He smelled dust just before he opened his eyes. His cheekbone hurt where it rested on a hard surface. So did his right shoulder. Puzzled, he pushed himself up and thumped his head on something above him that he couldn't see in the near-darkness.

Wincing, he saw open space to his left and realized that he was on some sort of raised shelf, about four feet above a worn, unpolished wooden floor. He shifted sideways, swung his legs out, and hopped down, his expensive black leather oxfords clunking loudly on the floor. Then he looked around in amazement.

He was in some kind of warehouse, poorly illuminated by lights that were out of sight somewhere. Still, he could see that shelves surrounded him, from the wooden floor up until they were lost in shadows over his head. Big wooden crates were suspended high above him by ropes and nets. The shelves around him were largely empty. The air was very cold.

"This is disgusting," he muttered. He couldn't remember where he had fallen asleep. This place was totally unfamiliar.

Ward Lyons was not a heavy drinker. Excessive drinking and illegal drugs were not part of his plan to skip rungs up the executive ladder. At age thirty, he was well on his way, but he had no memory of last night or how he could possibly have arrived here. When he got home maybe his wife, Genine, could tell him.

Muted voices reached him from a distance. Encouraged, he started walking. The heels of his shoes sounded with each step.

As he walked, he passed intersecting aisles that were just as dark as the one he was in. However, the place was quickly growing warmer, and soon more light began to reach him. He looked down and saw that his best gray business suit was wrinkled and dirty. The jacket looked as though it had been slept in, which of course was the case. His red tie was still tied around his neck, though it was pulled loose under the unfastened top button of his shirt. Even his black oxfords were scuffed and dusty.

Around him, the shelves were now full. He did not waste any time examining the items that crowded them, but a casual glance told him it all looked like junk. Maybe he was in some kind of storehouse for a charity.

Movement on the shelf to his left startled him. A five-gallon jar made of pink glass seemed to contain only smoke. However, the smoke was swirling around inside the jar.

Curious, Ward took a couple of steps toward the jar, bending down. He could not see any reason for the smoke to be moving, but it was. On the curved surface of the pink glass, he could see his own distorted reflection. His full, wavy brown hair was mussed from sleeping on that shelf. Self-consciously, he ran the fingers of one hand through his hair.

To the right of the jar, he saw a small toad carved out of a shiny blue stone. On the left, a small pile of red and orange maple leaves lay sealed in wax paper. Shaking his head, he walked on up the aisle.

When movement on his right caught his eye, he

looked and spotted a small brown and yellow teddy bear sitting on an upper shelf, over his head. He didn't stop. Even so, the bear's eyes seemed to follow him as he hurried past it.

Ward was sure that the items on the shelves were just cheap novelties with optical illusions, but they made him uncomfortable. He deliberately kept his head down and his eyes on the dusty wooden floor as he walked.

Up ahead, the voices were growing louder.

At last he turned a corner onto a perpendicular aisle. It was wider than the others and fully illuminated, though the light source was still out of sight. Several aisles ahead, he saw a short, portly middle-aged man in a green cardigan sweater standing with a young Asian woman. The man was bald on top and his remaining brown hair was turning gray. The woman was wearing a long blue denim skirt, a white peasant blouse, and striped socks.

"Hey! How do I get out of here?" Ward demanded, marching toward them.

The man turned in surprise.

The woman merely glanced at Ward for a second. "I didn't hear you," she said apologetically to the other man. "What are you looking for, again?"

"I'm looking for the—"

"I just want to know which way the door is," Ward said loudly. "Which way do I go?"

"One at a time, please," she said calmly, without looking at Ward. "Now, what are you trying to find?"

"My comic book collection," mumbled the man in the cardigan.

"Did you lose it, or just choose to get rid of it?"

"It was just gone when I came home from summer camp," he said, more confidently. "Years ago, when I was a teenager. I had some great ones. I had the first *Superboy*, where the cover is drawn to look like the bottom corner is being turned back. I had Gardner Fox *Green Lanterns*. And *Strange Adventures* with Adam Strange. And there were these shorts in the back of *Action Comics* called 'Congorilla,' where this magic ring could turn a guy into a gorilla." He sighed. "I suppose my mother threw them away, but I never really found out. To me, they were just lost."

"Jeez, pal, how old are you now?" Ward sneered.

The question went unanswered. The woman was looking over the other man's shoulder, down another aisle. "This way," she said.

She walked first, leading the man in the green cardigan. With a loud, impatient sigh, Ward joined them. When he looked up, he saw that she was following a small spot of light that was moving along one of the upper shelves. It fluttered through the shadows that fell between and across the many objects on all the shelves.

Puzzled, Ward stopped where he was, searching for the source of the moving dot of light. He peered carefully into the shadows in all directions. No beam of light came into his view.

Melinda Su walked down the aisle, watching the little spot of light carefully as it shifted over bottles, boxes,

stuffed animals, and all manner of other objects and containers that she did not take the time to look at carefully. The shy man seeking his old comic book collection was a pleasure to help. She did not look forward to dealing with the belligerent newcomer, but that was part of the occupation to which she had dedicated her life.

Suddenly the spot of light flitted down. When it reached the shelf above shoulder level to her, it stopped on a large cardboard box, with the flaps folded shut on the top. She rested one hand on the box and turned to the man right behind her.

"Look in here."

He glanced at her nervously, then reached in to pull up the flaps of the box. The flaps hit the shelf above it, though, and he had to pull the box partly out. From the sound it made, she could tell it was heavy. When he finally yanked open the flaps, she smelled old pulp paper. He grabbed some of the contents and lifted them part of the way out.

"It's them!" He giggled, flipping quickly through the titles. "My first *Superboy*! Yes! *Strange Adventures*, *Green Lantern*, yes! And *Lois Lane*—my *Lois Lanes* with Schaf-fenburger art! Yes!" He closed the flaps and pulled the box off the shelf completely, hugging it to his chest. "Thank you. *Thank you*. It's wonderful—I'm so *happy*." He was grinning like a little kid.

"You're very welcome," said Melinda, smiling gently. Struggling with the load, he hurried back up the aisle.

The other man, the new one, avoided him with a contemptuous glance as he strode down the aisle to Melinda. She saw that he was wearing a gray suit and shoes that looked very expensive. His loosened red tie glistened; she guessed that it was made of silk. The suit was carefully tailored to fit him, though it was badly wrinkled, and where his shoes weren't scuffed, they shone brightly even in the dim light. He had a very dynamic, confident walk. In spite of his rudeness, she found herself curious about him.

"What is this place, anyway?" He jerked a thumb after the other man. "You actually had *his* comics here?"

"Yes."

"*How*? I mean, where *are* we? Some kind of junk shop, huh?"

"This is Wong's Lost and Found Emporium. My name is Melinda. What's yours?"

"Ward Lyons. Now, look." He put his hands on his hips and looked straight into her eyes. "I want to know where the door to this place is. I can't waste any more time. How do I get out?"

"What city did you come from?"

"What? Come on, lady! *Where's the door?*"

"We have four doors," she said patiently. "They open on New York, San Francisco, Bosworth, Missouri, and Boca Raton, Florida."

"I'm from West Palm Beach," he said, not as loudly this time. "What did you say? About those other cities?"

"We have doors that open on them."

"You're crazy," Ward muttered, glancing around. "I'll find the door myself if I have to—" He suddenly jerked away from the shelves next to him in shock.

A large, heavy ashtray of dark green glass had just appeared on the shelf. It held some gobs of chewed gum and wadded-up wrappers. Ward stared at it.

"This is the place where lost things go," said Melinda. "If you lose something, it appears here. Not just material objects, but intangibles, too—lost opportunities, for instance, can appear in the form of an inanimate object or be personified by someone. If you can find one of the doors, you can come in to get something. But sometimes the doors . . . aren't there."

Ward was still looking at the ashtray. "What?"

"The doors appear and disappear at different times, completely on their own. You can't always find them."

He slowly turned to look at her.

"A little spot of light appears to point out what you want. The trick is, people can't see their own light. Someone else has to see it and follow it for you."

Ward eyed her suspiciously. "I want to get out of here. Now."

A tingle of doubt struck her. "You don't remember how you got here?"

"Well—what difference does that make?"

"How *did* you get here?"

"Obviously, I must have come in from Boca Raton. It's not a long drive from West Palm."

"Then why don't you remember where the door is?"

He looked at her for a long moment. "I woke up just a few minutes ago. I was sleeping on one of the shelves."

"I've heard of a person appearing on a shelf." She was almost whispering. Of course, the normal rules would still apply, she thought. A very few other people had arrived here the same way.

"What's wrong?"

"You must have been lost by someone. Who might come for you?"

"My wife, I guess. But maybe I'll just leave on my own."

"No. You won't be able to leave until someone comes for you."

He stared at her without speaking for a moment, then laughed shortly. "Yeah, sure. Who's going to keep me here—*you*?"

"The Emporium operates itself. I don't make any rules. I just help people work with them."

"Nonsense. Someone's always in charge. Where's the boss?"

"David—Mr. Wong—is elsewhere, with a customer. And this is a *very* large establishment when you actually begin to explore."

"Well, maybe by your standards. But you can't keep me here. I'm Vice-President of WestPalm Gold Software Consultants. I have to ride herd on the new computer system we're installing." He glared at her, his head thrust forward angrily.

"The door to Boca Raton is straight down this main aisle, all the way." She pointed. "But be careful."

He hesitated, looking down the aisle, and ran a hand through his tousled hair. Then his resolve returned. He marched away, his footsteps sounding on the floor. She watched him go.

Melinda had been in the shop for a long time. Sometimes she felt trapped here. She had grown very close to David Wong since they had decided to live here and tend the Emporium, but sometimes she had thought about returning to the world outside.

David Wong would never leave; this Emporium, they had both learned, was his destiny. She could leave any time, of course, but once on the outside, she could never be sure of finding the doors again if she wanted to come back. Besides, she now had no life outside to which she could return.

Ward strode down the aisle angrily, enjoying the hard tapping of his footsteps on the old wood. Once he got home, he could check his desk calendar and figure out what his plans had been last night. That would jog his memory enough to bring it back.

He deliberately kept his eyes straight ahead. The junk on the shelves was weird and kept distracting him if he actually looked at it. At the end of the aisle, the wall looked like nothing more than the side of an unfinished wooden warehouse. A beat-up old wooden piano and a black cast-iron stove were near the door.

The door was an ordinary wooden one with a round brass knob. The knob turned under his hand, and he yanked it open with relief. He stepped out, his hand still on the doorknob.

Nothing was beneath him. He fell, quickly gripping the doorknob as hard as he could. His weight swung the door almost shut, banging his arm against the jamb. Around him he could see only roiling clouds of light gray, neither smoke nor steam nor anything else he knew. He kicked wildly, panicked. A great hollow roar rose up from the void below, as though it was a living entity.

Ward flailed with his free hand, desperately seeking another hold. Suddenly he felt two hands grasp his wrist and lift. He drew on the doorknob and was slowly raised back into the doorway.

"Hang on," said Melinda, still pulling him back.

Ward hung on tight, straining to lift himself with his arms as Melinda kept her grip. Finally his scrambling feet swung up into the doorway and found purchase. He kicked himself back inside on his rear. Frantically, as she released him, he stood up and slammed the door. Then he turned and stared at her, trying to catch his breath. He was soaked in sweat, his heart pounding.

"I'm so sorry." She pulled some strands of long, black hair from her face with each hand and looked at him with placid brown eyes. "I was sure you couldn't leave, but I didn't know it would be dangerous. I'm sorry I didn't stop you in time."

Ward couldn't think; he couldn't manage an answer. He just wanted to get away from this door. Frenzied, he jogged crookedly past her, still gasping for breath, too shaken to run and too confused just to walk. Around him, as he rushed past the piano and the iron stove, the Emporium was quiet.

Melinda watched him go, overwhelmed with guilt. If he had fallen out the doorway into the void, she would

have blamed herself. This place was unpredictable in some ways, but she had known that he was trapped here. She had not known what form the imprisonment would take.

Melinda almost followed him to make sure nothing else dangerous happened to him. Then she realized that not only her guilt made her want to go after him. She was wondering if he could help her start a new life on the outside, if she chose to leave with him.

Melinda had considered going back to the outside for a couple of months. Her reason was not unhappiness with David; they had been very happy together and she could easily imagine spending her life with him. However, she wondered sometimes what the outside was like now—and about the places she might go, jobs she could get, friends she would make. As much as the Emporium had been home to her, she wondered if she wanted to stay here forever.

If she wanted Ward to help her on the outside, and claimed him as someone who could help, then she was certain that she would be allowed to take Ward out with her when she left.

That was a selfish reason to follow him. He would be all right now that he knew he truly could not leave on his own. She turned and walked another way.

When Ward recovered from his panic, he found himself standing in a corner nook among the shelves. A male lion, stuffed in a rearing position, rose up over him. High above the aisle, an entire horse, a bay, hung upside down by ropes tied to its legs. Copper pennies were stacked on the shelf across from him. Next to them, he saw a red plastic squirt gun shaped like a Luger.

Footsteps sounded far down the aisle. Expecting to see that Melinda again, he got to his feet and brushed dust from the back of his suit. This one was trash now, but soon the time would have come to buy new, more fashionable ones anyway.

A man in a similar gray suit, though slightly darker in shade, came into view down the aisle. He was walking tentatively, as though he was as confused by this place as Ward. Suddenly Ward recognized him. It was Tom Royson, a subordinate of his at WestPalm Gold for the last six years.

"Tom! Tom, over here!" Ward started to hurry down the aisle, then slowed down again to regain his dignity. He began to wave his arm, then decided to smooth down his hair instead.

Tom looked up in surprise. "Ward?" He was a year younger than Ward. They had the same rather average brown hair; Tom had taken Ward's advice about where to buy his suits and shoes and ties.

"Of course it's me! I'm glad to see you. Now let's get out of this septic tank, all right?"

"What are you doing here, Ward?" Tom spoke meekly, as usual.

"That's my business," Ward snapped. "Now get me out of here."

"What? Go wherever you want." Tom turned and started away.

"Hey!" Ward caught his arm and yanked him around. "Did you come to get me or not, Royson?"

"Of course not." Tom jerked his arm free. "How would I know you were here? I just got here myself." He started walking again.

"Of course you came for me. What else would you come here for?"

Tom whirled around and stopped. "All right, you want to know? I came in here looking for a chance to make the right career choice—one that I somehow lost, Ward. I lost it just about the time I started trusting you."

"What's that supposed to mean? Are you forgetting who gave you your first management level job? Who promised to groom you as a protegee, and to see that you met all the right people?"

"Oh, I remember just fine, Ward—I remember that after you hired me, all the promises were forgotten. I remember that you couldn't be bothered to invite me to the important parties or bring me in on the crucial negotiations. You went off to the important conventions and left me to order new carpeting for the office! That's what I remember, Ward."

Ward was shocked. Tom had never spoken to him so bluntly before, had never challenged him like this.

"You have my two-week notice—from *now*." Tom marched away.

Speechless, Ward just watched him go.

"You always so high-handed?"

Ward jumped, startled by the dry, raspy voice of an old man. He turned and saw a tall, gaunt man in worn work pants and a red and black plaid flannel shirt come around a corner behind him, moving with the slow stiffness of age.

"Easy, friend. Your name is Ward? I'm Jim Frawley." He held out his hand.

Ward shook it, and found the man's bony grip firm but cold.

"He's an ingrate," Ward said weakly, jerking his thumb after Tom. "I was going to bring him along, take care of him."

"Don't mind him no more," said Jim. "He's gone now. That happens. There's one man in here I'm not surprised to see abandoned. He's a very cranky old fella named Ambrose."

Ward nodded, not really very interested.

"You still have a chance, young fella. Ain't nobody comin' for me, now. It's been too long."

"What?" Ward looked up at him. "How long have you been here?"

"Well, let me think. Quite some time now."

A little girl came around the corner behind him. She had long, blonde hair in ringlets, and wore a long lilac-print dress that buttoned down the front. Her black shoes were buttoned all the way up her ankles.

"Hi, there, young 'un," said Jim. "Ward, this here is Sally Elmore. She's ten. Say something, young 'un."

"I'm pleased to meet you." Looking up at Ward with wide blue eyes, she took the edges of her dress in her hand and curtsied.

"Hi," said Ward, staring at her in amazement. He was

scared now, deeply frightened, but also touched by her calm courtesy. "Sally . . . how long have you been here?"

"I don't know. Almost as long as I can remember."

Ward knelt down in front of her. "Can you remember anything from before you were here? Maybe about your mother and father?"

"Father wore a long black coat. Mother wore a blue and white dress like mine." She spoke by rote, as though she remembered the words more than she remembered her mother and father.

"Can you remember anything else? About either one of them?"

"Tell him about your Pa's politics," said Jim.

"Oh . . . He said he liked Honest Abe."

Ward stared at her.

"Did you come to get me, sir?"

"Uh—no. No, I didn't. I . . . can't leave, either. But who takes care of you?"

"Lots of people. Melinda and David are nice. So's Mr. Frawley. And the woman who wears the leather cap and goggles."

"I see," Ward said quietly.

"Did you come to take me home and be my father?"

She looked up at him hopefully.

"Not No, I—goodbye!" Ward turned abruptly and stalked up the aisle, his heels pounding on the floor.

At the first corner he reached, he grabbed the edge of the shelves and swung around it sharply. He glimpsed long, wavy blonde hair in a blur just before he banged his jaw against a woman's forehead. Wincing, he took a step backward.

"Ward?" Lynn Benton rubbed her head and looked at him. As pretty as ever, she was wearing a very short, low-cut red and white dress that he recognized. Her precise makeup and the bright, cheerful colors of her dress seemed oddly out of place in this dim, dreary warehouse.

"Lynn!" Ward threw his arms around her. She was a former secretary with whom he had once had a prolonged affair. "Hey, I'm glad to see you. Let's get out of here."

"Stop it!" She pulled back, cradling a small stoneware jug against her ample front. Her white pumps thunked loudly on the floor as she avoided him. "Ward, what are you doing here?"

"I want to get out of here. Didn't you come to . . ."

He stopped suddenly.

"Come to what?"

"Come to get me?"

"I need privacy, Ward." She started to walk around him.

"But . . . wait a second." He tried to think of something to say. "What's that thing?"

"This is what some man got for me. It's what I came for."

"A jug?" He laughed lightly. "You lose some moonshine?"

"What I lost was a chance at a real relationship—a serious one."

"What?"

"Instead of wasting my time with the boss. I believed you were going to get divorced, like you kept saying—that was my mistake. Now I can have my lost opportunity back, with a guy who won't use me like you did." She turned and marched away down the aisle, her high heels tapping a defiant farewell.

Melinda could not forget Ward Lyons. Her other customers were routine today; some were hurt, some angry, and some scared, but she was able to follow the spot of light that led her to whatever each of them had come to find. When she had a free moment, she went looking for the man whom she might take out of here.

When she came up behind Ward, he was standing in front of Jim Frawley. Ward had swept back the sides of his gray suit jacket to put his hands on his hips.

"What's the real secret here?" Ward demanded. "Who do I have to bribe to get out?"

The lanky older man just shook his head and turned away.

"There is no secret," said Melinda.

Ward spun around and grabbed her shoulders. "Then what's going on? You can't tell me that I've just seen two people I know purely by accident. How did they get here?"

"I'm not sure," said Melinda, gently moving his hands away. "But I think that when you became lost, you triggered a convergence of forces within the Emporium."

"A convergence of forces?" He frowned at her.

"Time is different here. People you see here might have entered a long time ago by the date on the outside, months or years apart—or today, even though you saw them together here."

"But what do I have to do with it?"

"You either directly or indirectly caused all of them to lose what they were seeking. For that reason, you drew them to you."

Ward stared into her eyes for a long moment. Then he backed against a set of shelves and slumped down to the floor. "But I tried so hard," he whispered, dejected. "I worked so hard. Everybody knew that. People looked up to me. They appreciated what I did. They needed me."

Melinda heard no certainty in his tone now.

Jim Frawley had heard him, too. He walked back slowly, in his stiff gait, and leaned down to punch Ward lightly on the arm. Sally followed the old man and hugged Ward, though Ward did not seem to notice either one of them. They, and the other lost people here, had all experienced this moment of realization themselves.

"He's the one you told me about?"

Startled, Melinda turned to the man who had come up behind her. "When did you come down this direction?" she asked.

"Just now. I got something for a woman. Is that him?"

"Yes. He's finally facing why he's really here."

The man nodded, stepped forward, and held his hand down to Ward. "I'm David Wong. Welcome to the Emporium."

Ward stared at the hand, then slapped it out of his way

angrily. He pushed himself to his feet. Without a word, he stalked away from them all.

At the first turn, he slowed before swiveling around the corner back to the main aisle he had walked down before. He marched down the aisle, then turned another corner. Then he stopped, directionless, and simply stood there for a few minutes.

When he chose to walk again, he moved slowly, not sure where to go or why. He turned a few more corners. No one ran into him this time, but around the third corner he saw a woman about thirty feet down the aisle, looking at a blue glass bottle in her hands. The door that supposedly opened on Boca Raton was just past her. Melinda was just now disappearing around a corner near the door, apparently after helping this woman.

He stopped; rather than pass too close to anyone else in this weird place, he would go the other way. Then he recognized the woman down the aisle. It was his wife, Genine.

She was chubby now, her shoulders rounded as she struggled with the cork in the blue bottle. Her brown hair was short and flat. When they had married, she had been slender. She had always walked erect to show off her rich brown tresses, and had always dressed stylishly. Now she wore an old blue raincoat with a belt that was swaying, unbuckled, as she wrestled with the cork.

Cautiously, Ward walked toward her. His heart pounded with the hope that she had come for him—but of course, he realized, she had really come for whatever was in that bottle. He knew that much now. Still, she usually did whatever he told her to do.

Just as Ward started to say her name, she pulled the cork out of the bottle with a loud pop. Blue-black vapors swirled out of the bottle, enveloping her, billowing over him. He choked on the bitter taste, his eyes watering, unable to speak.

Through the dark ether, he recognized the living room of their home in West Palm Beach. It was furnished as it had been in the first year of their marriage, in postmodern gold and white decor. Genine was radiant, in a very low-cut, flowing black dress with elegant blue and gold trim; she was slender and graceful, her wavy hair full and shiny. Their guests, also in their glittering evening wear, were enthralled as they clustered around her, listening to her every word—but the scene was silent in the eddy of vapors.

Suddenly, this figure of Genine spun in surprise and Ward saw himself, in a white dinner jacket with a blue carnation on the lapel, stride angrily into the room with a blue dress wadded under one arm. His mouth was moving angrily.

Genine shouted back, puzzlement on her face; their guests watched with their smiles uncertain now, frozen in place. Then, his face contorted, he shouted and flung the blue dress in her face. As she failed to pluck it off, he pushed past her into another room. She yanked the dress away, in tears, and ran up the long, curving staircase out of sight.

Ward remembered that night. He had wanted her in a more modest gown. She had even put it on and come

back down, but she had not spoken to anyone for the rest of the night. For the first time, he realized that she had never been the same after that. She had been broken by the humiliation.

The dark vapors dissipated and Ward found himself back in the dim, shadowed aisle of the Emporium. He swallowed, wincing from their bitter aftertaste. Then he looked for Genine.

She was marching down the aisle away from him, her back straight, her head held high. Without breaking stride, she yanked open the door at the end of the aisle and slipped out. Just before it closed, he glimpsed bright sunlight and tall palm trees swaying against a blue sky.

Ward knew she would end their marriage now, whether or not he ever got out of this place. He shivered, no longer angry but cold deep inside. Suddenly he spun the other way and began to run.

Melinda hurried along a shadowed aisle toward the sound of running feet. She knew that Ward had gone in that direction, and she had heard the Boca Raton door close. The footsteps quickly grew faint, however, without slowing down. Not sure which way to go, she hesitated next to a basket of doll's heads, with wide, staring blue eyes and permanent smiles. Next to the basket, something scaly slithered out of sight behind a badly scraped and dented maize and blue football helmet.

She envied Ward, despite his distress. He had an involvement with life that she missed. She was very fond of David, but the Lost and Found Emporium was *his* destiny. It might not be hers.

Ward ran, turning corners at random, fleeing the vapors, the memory of Genine, the trap this place had become. He darted up one aisle, across another, then back down again. Finally, as he staggered to a stop, gasping for breath, little Sally stuck her head around a corner.

"Hey, Mister! Over here!" Then she slipped away.

He followed her along a wall to a place where an old dusty player piano and a sooty cast-iron stove stood slightly away from the wall, forming a narrow hiding place. Suddenly he realized where he was; the door to Boca Raton was just to his left. Sally ducked between the piano and the stove and sat down, out of sight. As she watched him with those wide blue eyes, he eased sideways after her and collapsed to the floor, lowering his forehead to rest on his bony upraised knees. His eyes stung with tears.

Melinda walked quickly, with quiet determination. She could not truly answer the question of whether she was better off in the Emporium or trying life on the outside again, but she had made her decision. Ward was no longer the arrogant, shallow bully she had first met. When she found him, she would offer to take him out, after he located for her the lost opportunity to live her life on the outside. Now she had to find him before she lost her nerve.

Still following the sound of footsteps, she turned another corner. Instead of Ward, however, she found a

woman walking hesitantly up the aisle. The stranger was about thirty, Melinda judged, and wore a plain orange tank top and faded blue jeans.

"Can I help you find something?" Melinda asked.

"Oh . . . yes, I hope so." She smiled shyly, twirling a strand of straight, sunbleached hair around one finger.

"Is this—I mean, can I ask for, um . . ."

Melinda smiled gently. "Nothing will surprise me. And I won't laugh at you, either. Ask for what you really want."

"I want my lost chance to be happy." It was almost a whisper.

"Is there something specific?"

"Well, just . . . to be loved. To mean something to someone."

Melinda nodded sympathetically. A narrow circle of light was moving slowly up the aisle, rippling over the darkened shapes on the shelves as it passed. "This way."

They walked in silence. Their footsteps tapped quietly, rhythmically, as Melinda followed the spot of light up this aisle, to the right along another, then left up a third one. It slipped along one of the outer walls, across a cast-iron stove, and stopped on the wall just beyond it. Below the light, Sally looked up at her. Ward sat slumped over his knees.

Ward lifted his head slowly to look up. His eyes were red.

"Someone has come for you," said Melinda, with sudden disappointment.

"What?" With a surge of hope, Ward gripped the side of the stove to pull himself up. Then he looked at the other woman, blinking away tears. Her features were pleasant, but ordinary.

"Ward?" She was studying his face. "Ward Lyons?"

"Do I know you?"

"Julie Harding." She smiled wistfully. "From high school."

"Julie!" Ward grinned in sudden recognition. Then his stomach tightened. He had gone steady with her throughout their senior year and the following summer. Then he had just stopped calling her right before he had left for college. She had been too quiet, too ordinary, too uninteresting for the future he had been planning. He had been too cowardly even to say so, and he had skipped town, leaving her to wonder why, with strict instructions to his parents never to pass on his address or phone number.

"How are you?" She spoke shyly, but looked him in the eye.

He shook his head, speechless. Then he turned to Melinda. "How can she have come for me? She lost me years ago. Why didn't I appear here back then?"

"I don't think you were lost just by Julie," Melinda said slowly. "You were lost by your friends, coworkers, the women in your life now. When the last of them lost you, you arrived here."

Ward nodded slowly.

"What Julie lost—"

"I wasn't thinking of any one person," Julie said softly.

"I came searching for a . . . a lost chance at happiness, at having a family, at being loved. That's what I came for."

So she hadn't really come for him, either. Yet he remembered the good times, even though they had both been kids back then. She was level-headed, affectionate, and honest. He really had loved her, though he had put his career plans ahead of everything.

Ward reached back and took Sally's small, cool hand. He sidestepped out to the aisle. She shuffled shyly after him.

"I can't go with you," he said quietly. "I don't deserve it."

Julie searched his face, then looked down at Sally.

"You want a family? You want to be loved? Take her. Please."

"Did you come to take me away and be my mother?" Sally asked. With her free hand, she plucked at her dress and curtsied.

"Yes." Julie's eyes teared suddenly. "Yes, I did. If you would like to come with me."

Sally, still staring up at her, nodded solemnly.

Julie took her hand from him. "Are you sure, Ward?"

"Take her," he said huskily. "Go on, before I change my mind."

"All right."

Melinda stood aside. Hand in hand, Julie and Sally walked toward the door. Ward's gaze remained on the wooden floor.

Melinda caught up with Julie and Sally and stopped them so she could kneel and give Sally a long hug. The girl's bony arms squeezed back. Then Melinda stood up and gave Julie an encouraging nod. After they had gone, she would speak to Ward about leaving with him. Now he was genuinely appealing.

Julie opened the door. The warm, humid air of south Florida wafted inside. With a shy smile for Melinda, she started out, still holding Sally's hand.

A familiar white spot of light was flicking back and forth across their backs as they walked. Then they were outside and it was washed out by the bright sunlight,

gone forever. Melinda looked at Ward. It had to be his light.

For one very long moment, she wanted to reach for the door and close it after them, but she could not. That spot of light was what she was here to find. It was the duty she had chosen. It was her life. Finally, she grabbed Ward's arm and pulled him to the open doorway.

"Go after them! Hurry!"

"But I can't!" He resisted, leaning hard against her pull. "I'll fall into that . . . void. Forever." He yanked free.

"No! You won't. You lost something, too, over the years—the ability to give instead of take. Your unselfishness. Sally and Julie brought that back to you—but it lies with them! They're what *you've* lost. You can go now. Go after them!"

Ward looked out the doorway. Julie and Sally were walking hand in hand, smiling at each other. He looked down at the threshold, frozen by fear.

"I *know* it's safe. Please listen to me!" Melinda wailed.

He took a deep breath and placed his foot outside. Shifting his weight cautiously, he finally felt the hard, cracked concrete of an alley under his foot. Suddenly laughing with exhilaration, he ran after them, past a large dumpster, his gray suit jacket flapping behind him. At the end of the alley, he stopped and turned around to wave. All he saw behind him was a smooth wall of concrete blocks, covered by old, chipped yellow paint.

Ahead of him, Julie and Sally had turned at the sound of his running steps. They were waiting, smiling, with their arms open.

As soon as Melinda saw Ward safely running up the alley, she closed the door behind him. She walked away slowly in the shadowed Emporium, smiling wistfully. Tears blurred her vision and she stopped for a moment.

"Something wrong?" David had just come down the aisle.

"No." She took his arm with both hands and leaned against him affectionately. "No. Everything is just the way it should be." ♦

Life in the Air

**Barry N. Malzberg
and
Jack Dann**

Stephen and Laura found themselves slowly rising into the air, levitating though the oppressive spaces of their rent-controlled apartment with the slow and terrible precision of swimmers, as their marriage came apart over that long and difficult summer.

"It must be a metaphor," Stephen would say to his dark-haired, twenty-eight-year-old wife, as he did slow turns and circles in the air, as he placed palms against the ceiling, reversing himself and kicking toward the bedroom. But Laura would confront him, concealing her anger in condescension, and explain that this was life itself, that there was nothing more, that there had never been anything more, except perhaps dreams.

Life itself: Outside their apartment, Laura and Stephen felt themselves more rooted to the pavement than ever before. It was as if gravity was the illness, and heavy and jointless they would plod their way through the various events of their day. Laura was a psychological social worker at the state office, and Stephen was a veterinarian, which one might



Illustration by Jean Elizabeth Martin

think would give him a few ideas about how to deal with flight. He had tended all manner of birds, from toucans and macaws to hawks and doves and Leadbeater cockatoos, and had often given tetracycline to budgerigar lovebirds burning with fever, for his specialty was winged things. But he had no prescription for his own marriage, which was as dry and dead as an abandoned nest. It was his fault. It was her fault. He couldn't guess how it had deteriorated. They were just being carried along; it was the natural course of things, he supposed. After sex had begun to dry up, they were left with the uncomfortable realization that what they had was small talk. Now neither had anything to say to the other about their jobs, their goals and frustrations and feelings. Just as they had become feather-light inside the confines of their apartment, so had everything of import become a burden. It had become impossible to talk of matters of gravity in their weightless world.

During that poisoned summer their focus seemed too narrow. The colors and spaces of the day were only something through which to move until they could get back to the apartment. There they would eat Stouffers frozen dinners that had floated steaming in the microwave oven, and then they would hurl insults at one another as they dove through archways and flew in circles over their antique sleigh bed. Laura would accuse him of being just like his faithless sister, who was now a military dependent in Thailand. His sister had told him at their last painful meeting, over their father's grave, that he would never amount to anything. "You're shallow and unfeeling," she had said. "You can't deal with people, so you deal with cats and birds." He had said very little to her in response, a family tradition. Most of what he had wanted to say to his parents and sister, he had said to Laura in the first six years of their marriage. She had become a receptacle for his poison.

In the seventh year they began to levitate.

Now they needed to sleep in loose ropes of sheets, or risk the stunning wedge of ceiling that would welcome them to light at six in the morning.

First it had been the ashtrays, then the toothbrushes and silverware and bric-a-brac such as the crystal paperweights and Lalique china pieces; even the graphics and watercolors had lifted away from the walls and hung suspended in the air. The rising of smaller objects was like a warning, for shortly thereafter Stephen slowly rose free of the limitations of gravity, Stephen before Laura, for he had always been the leader in the relationship; she had never had a chance to set the conditions. As they floated around the apartment, the inanimate objects, the utensils and ashtrays and paintings, settled back down, regained their proper weight, as if in compensation. It was only the occasional spoon or steak or matchbook that would lift into the air, as if they had a mind to break the unspoken rules.

The more difficult the marriage became, the more Stephen and Laura floated free. Now they weren't even able to touch carpet or linoleum for a few minutes to regain perspective and balance. They were like two astro-

nauts in housedress and pajamas. But their arguments had lately gone so far out of control that Stephen contemplated flinging himself over the windowsill. He dreamed that he would float gracefully from the twelfth floor to the concrete of Amsterdam Avenue, but he had never done this, not once. Some elemental caution, some core of what he called sanity, but what was probably only fear, had kept him locked inside the apartment. During the short but inevitable times of lesser strain, they would caution each other on making public their circumstance. They could both agree on something: that their dark and difficult lives had to be worked out within the reaches of the apartment or not be worked out at all. There were no middle grounds here, no careful compromises with flight, no way in which he and Laura could exist in gravity outside and levitation within; there would have to be some reckoning within and without, and yet, somehow, poised for decision as he might have been, Stephen found himself existing in two ways: floating within, graven and grounded without. A choice would have to be made, but he was unable to make it. He could only see himself in this simultaneity . . . this trap.

And the arguments continued, but they were all somehow the same argument, yet the core of their hatred and frustrations was so deeply buried that it could not be found. Instead, Stephen and Laura argued about misplaced combs and brushes, errands forgotten, overcharged bank cards, the inequality of the relationship, Stephen's predilection for waitresses and shopgirls, Laura's puritan sexual attitudes and morbid fear and loathing of all household pets. They both had a vague recognition that a hidden subtext weaved their many arguments together, but neither one could disarm, lest they be vulnerable to the other. All that was left was argument and familiar ritual, which in its way was another correlative of Laura's maxim that *this* was life itself.

But, oh, if his devoted old ladies, who lived for their cats and ribboned dogs, if her dangerous youths and food-stamp epicureans had been able to glimpse them in that apartment that summer! he thought. They were such figures of authority. Then why couldn't they keep their feet on the floor? Why couldn't they walk from bed to refrigerator or toilet without taking off like helium balloons on a Fourth of July field day? Why couldn't they bump up against one another in the dark without that sudden and shocking speeding away? It was a rich and dangerous, a dark and provocative time, and yet Stephen knew that when he thought back on this summer, as he surely, surely would, he would remember only the fatigue and panic of finding himself tangling in the sheets at dawn, strangling in the sheets, bobbing against the ceiling.

Their sex was as furtive and bounded as their movement otherwise was free. They had had to work out an intricate arrangement of restraints in order to couple. But Stephen was not much interested in sex, anyway. He had rationalized that what he called "the rigamarole" had made him dysfunctional, and he gave it up with a sense of relief, for sex had always been an effort for him

anyway, and he had been looking for an excuse to quit ever since she suggested and then demanded mutual satisfaction. He just didn't have the patience, and he felt like a sexual Sisyphus straining against a cold unyielding rock during those infrequent times when he tried to bring her to orgasm.

"You never desired me," Laura would say to him. "You were only interested in waitresses and girls on the street. And that's all right because now *I'm* not interested any more. I don't want to make love with you. I don't even want to *live* with you any more. I'd be out of here in a second, except for the rents and the fact that I was here first."

That was true. Stephen had moved in with her, and then they had gotten married. But although Stephen could fly through their apartment like any canary or finch or conure or cockatoo or his beloved budgerigars, he couldn't stabilize himself long enough to pack up and move out. Nor did he have the heart to leave.

Around and around that apartment they flew during that tortured summer, swimmers in space, Icarus in the dust and steaming Amsterdam Avenue air. As their screaming confrontations grew ever longer, their proficiency in flight became complete, so that as they moved toward something climactic, Stephen realized that the emotional abyss and the Icarian idea were the same thing.

But he did not know if he had the strength to confront them.

Asleep, Stephen is wrenched against a wall while Laura hangs just below the ceiling. Each dreams the other, but they cannot connect, cannot touch. In his fever dream, Stephen speeds out the bedroom window into the acrid, polluted night air, but it is like perfume to him as at last he commits himself to freedom and dreams and the impossible. He arcs through the ebony bowl of sky and then suddenly plunges into a New York dawn grown enormous; he passes through its rainbow thermoclines and speeds toward the Seacausus Flats, the imagined freedom of New Jersey. While Stephen flies, Laura groans in her sleep, for she dreams that Stephen has left her, that he has gone. But she dreams that in his flight is her fall, and in that knowledge she finds herself cresting to some enormous height and function of her own; she dreams that if she were to open her eyes and emerge from this gasping, asphyxiating sleep, she would find at last what she so desperately needed . . . but so emerging, so waking, finds herself locked to herself on the bed, limbs drawn in. The apartment is empty at last. In the darkness, only the numbers of the silent digital clock glow malignantly.

But with simultaneous dread and hope, she strains to hear, and she discerns the sound of Stephen screaming in the distance, screaming all the way to sudden declination. Screaming all the way to the dull boom of impact.

Slowly she expands with knowledge, even as she is rooted with grief. Fly no more?

Laura can hardly breathe.

And Stephen is not at all. ♦

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Comments on the magazine and its content are especially welcome now that AMAZING® Stories is coming out in a full-size, full-color format—we want to find out what you think of the new look. Which stories and features did you like, and which ones could you do without? To help us separate readers' comments from other mail we receive, please write "Letter to the Editor" in the lower left-hand corner of the envelope.

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We will consider any letter of comment and criticism to be eligible for publication, unless you specifically say in your letter that you *don't* want it printed. An unsigned letter will not be considered for publication, but we will withhold a writer's name on request. If you give us your full mailing address when you write and your letter is printed, we'll send you a complimentary issue of the magazine in which it appears.

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Isabella of Castile Answers Her Mail



James Morrow

TO YOU, DON CRISTÓBAL COLÓN, our Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy and Governor of all the Islands to be found by you on your Great Voyage of Discovery, greetings and grace.

What a beautiful and welcome sight was your albatross messenger, swooping out of the skies like a new soul arriving in Heaven! How your letter raised my failing hopes and lifted my sagging spirits! O brave mariner, I feel confident that the seagoing gardens of which you spoke, those vast floating mats of sargasso weed, signify that your fleet has at last drawn near the Indies. By the time these words appear before your eyes, you will have walked the bejeweled streets of Cathay and toured the golden temples of Cipango.

Dear friend, I should like to know your opinion concerning a most troublesome matter. Do you hold any particular views on the Jewish Question? Predictably, my Edict of General Expulsion has proven highly controversial here at court. Our Keeper of the Privy Purse—I speak now of Santángel, perhaps the loudest of all those voices championing your expedition—became distressed to the point of tears, though as a *converso* he is

Illustration by Jon Weisman

doubtless biased by his blood. The clergy was divided, with Deza calling the measure vital to the future of the Church and Perez quoting the Sermon on the Mount. But it was my old confessor, Torquemada, who used the strongest words. As long as unbelievers live among us, the Inquisitor explained, there can be no racial purity, no *limpieza de sangre*, in Spain.

And yet, three nights ago a vivid and disquieting dream came to me. I no longer wore the Crown of Castile but the war helmet of Rameses II. Am I the new Pharaoh? In banishing Spain's Jews, have I thrust myself forever into God's disfavor? O Cristóbal, my heart feels like one of those great iron anchors you will soon be dropping into the waters off Asia.

Written in our City of Santa Fe on this twenty-seventh day of August, in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1492.

I, THE QUEEN

TO YOU, ISABELLA, by the Grace of God Queen of Castile, León, Aragón, Granada, Sicily, Sardinia, and the Balearics, greetings and increase of good fortune.

Alas, we passed through the Sargasso Sea without sighting the Indies, a situation so dismaying to my officers and men that they begged me to turn back. I was comforting them as best I could, pointing out that we had not yet gone two thousand miles (though in truth we had gone twenty-eight hundred), when the Ocean Sea began suddenly to swell, arching like a mountain range in motion, pulling its slopes and valleys intact behind it. We rode those waves, my Queen, plummeting inexorably from crest to cavity and back again. Terror-struck at first, we soon realized that God Himself had sent this cataclysm to speed us toward the Moluccas. Such a miracle has not occurred since Egypt's chariots gave chase to the Children of Israel!

You spoke of Spain's own Jews. By curious coincidence the same tide that bore the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María* out of port also carried what I took to be a contingent of your General Expulsion, that Second Exodus that weighs so heavily on your heart. As we traveled down the Rio Saltes to the sea, our way was blocked by every sort of vessel imaginable, their holds jammed with refugees clutching kettles, crockery, toys, lanterns, and other meager possessions. Initially this scene aroused in your Admiral an unequivocal pity (the weeping, the wailing, the old ones jumping overboard and crawling onto the rocks to die, the rabbis beseeching Yahweh to part the waters of the Levant and lead the people dry-shod to a new Promised Land), but then Father Hojeda invited me to see it in a different light. "By driving the infidels from its cities, towns, and fields," Hojeda explained, "the Crown has made room for the pagan hordes we shall soon be ferrying to Spain from the Orient, thousands upon thousands of unbaptized souls yearning to embrace the Holy Faith." So do not despair, Sovereign Queen. Your edict has served a divine plan.

I must rest my pen. A cry of "*Tierra!*" has just gone

up from the lookout stationed atop our mainmast. *Gloria in excelsis Deo*—the impossible is accomplished! We have sailed west and met the East!

Written aboard the caraval *Santa María* on this second day of September, in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1492.

I, THE ADMIRAL

TO YOU, DON CRISTÓBAL COLÓN, our Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy and Governor of all the Islands to be found by you on your Great Voyage of Discovery, greetings and grace.

For five whole days I brooded upon the sobering news from North Africa—racking rumors of Jews cast naked into the sea by the captains we had hired to deport them, wrenching accounts of those very exiles starving on forgotten shores, grisly tales of these same refugees being eviscerated by Turkish mobs in quest of swallowed coins. Then came your letter of the second.

O noble navigator, you have surely delivered your Queen from madness! I now see that the true and final purpose of our expedition is not to plot a new route to the Indies, nor is it to forge an alliance with the Great Khan, nor is it to build a bastion from which we might attack the Turkish rear and win back Constantinople (though each of these aims is worthy). I now see that its true and final purpose is to lead all Asia to the Holy Faith. Not since my correspondence with Sixtus IV, through which he so kindly allayed my fears that in reducing the children of heretics to beggary the Inquisition had overstepped its mandate, has my conscience known such release. Is it blasphemous for a Queen to compare her Admiral with her Pope? Then may God forgive me.

So, courageous conquistador, you have found the Moluccas at last. In your subsequent missives you may, if so inclined, make mention of the following matters: gold, silver, rubies, sapphires, diamonds, emeralds, precious silks, rare spices. But speak to me first and foremost of the spiritual condition of the Indian people. Do they seem well disposed to receive the Gospel? Does Father Hojeda wish to perform all the baptisms himself, or shall I send a company of priests in your wake?

Written in our City of Santa Fe on this seventh day of September, in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1492.

I, THE QUEEN

TO YOU, ISABELLA, by the Grace of God Queen of Castile, León, Aragón, etc., greetings and increase of good fortune.

How can mere words convey the miracle that is the Indies? How can I begin to describe the mysteries and marvels that have dazzled us in recent days? Vast, glittering palaces! Mighty minarets belching smoke and fire! Ships that sail without benefit of wind! Coaches that move without a single horse in harness! Carriages that fly through the air on featherless wings!

After slipping beneath the largest bridge I have ever seen, a mile-long passageway stretching over our heads like a bronze rainbow, our fleet sailed up a dark and oily strait and anchored off what we took to be one of the lesser Moluccas. Dominating the island was an iron idol rising a hundred and fifty feet at least, surmounting a pedestal of almost equal height. I forthwith gathered together an exploration party consisting of Father Hojeda, Captain Pinzón, and myself; plus our translator, Luis de Torres; and our master-at-arms, Diego de Harana. We came ashore in the dinghy of the *Santa María*, assembled in the shadow of the idol, and, thrusting the royal standard of Castile into the grassy soil, claimed the island for the Crown.

A most astonishing fact: there is no *limpieza de sangre* in Asia. Everywhere we turned, our eyes beheld a different fashion in flesh—dark, light, rough, coarse—and our ears rang with the greatest confusion of tongues since the Tower of Babel toppled. We saw Moors. We saw Nubians. Greeks. Jews. From amid the general cacophony Torres claimed he could discern not only Portuguese, Arabic, Yiddish, and Polish, but also the language of my native Genoa, though I caught no such syllables myself. Surprisingly, we soon encountered a sizable percentage of Indians for whom a peculiarly cadenced Castilian is the medium of choice. (I must confess, I was not aware that your Highness's overland merchantile endeavors had placed so many Spaniards in the Orient.) But the greatest shock, surely, was the omnipresence of English, not only in the mouths of the Indians but on the plethora of public signs, banners, mottoes, and decrees.

"Give me your weary, your indigent, your huddled multitudes seeking to breathe without hindrance, the miserable garbage of your crowded beaches . . ." So began Torres's rather diffident rendering of the incantation that accompanies the idol. (English is not his forte.) "Send these, the homeless, typhoon-buffed to me," he continued. "I lift my lantern beside the portal of gold."

The idol's form is female, and she evidently embodies something called *libertad*—a difficult idea to explicate, but Torres has inferred it means "giving free rein to your worst instincts and basest impulses." No doubt the "huddled multitudes" are sacrificial victims. Some are probably burned to death—hence the firebrand in the idol's right hand. Others are impaled alive—hence the seven dreadful spikes decorating her crown.

With the setting of the sun I directed my party back to the caravels, dined alone on ham and beer, and began the present epistle. We are uncertain of our next move. From the Indians' chatter, Torres has surmised that other Moluccas lie in our vicinity—the Spice Island of Ellis to the north, the Spice Island of Governors to the east, the Spice Island of Manhattan to the northeast—and we are strongly inclined to explore them. But, O my Queen, this idol of *libertad* vexes us most sorely. The very sight of her looming over the fleet brings ice to our bowels. Might you perchance be willing to dispatch a regiment of soldiers to the Indies, so that we might undertake to baptize this cult without fear of immolation? Eagerly I await your reply.

Written aboard the caraval *Santa María* on this twelfth day of September, in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1492.

I, THE ADMIRAL

TO YOU, DON CRISTÓBAL COLÓN, our Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy and Governor of all the Islands to be found by you on your Great Voyage of Discovery, greetings and grace.

Frankly, my Admiral, we don't quite know what to make of your Spice Islands and their polyglot aborigines. As with the Jewish Question, the court is of several minds. Santángel thinks you have may stumbled upon the Lost Tribes of Israel. The clergy believes you have sailed past the Indies and landed in one of these secret colonies set up by Europe's escaped convicts and fugitive mineuters.

In any event we cannot send you infantry support. Now that Granada is ours, we have demobilized the army, leaving in uniform only our border troops, our palace guards, and our Santa Hermandad. But even if an extra regiment did lie at our disposal, we would not send it across the Ocean Sea. Dearest Cristóbal, have you forgotten the sheer power of Scripture? Do you doubt the potency of Truth? Once Father Hojeda tells them the whole story, from the Virgin Birth to the Resurrection, this *libertad* cult will surely abandon its wicked, pagan, persecuting ways. So say friars Deza and Perez.

This is not a happy time for the Queen of Castile. My daughter still grieves for her husband, the Crown Prince Alfonso, killed last month in a riding accident, and she evinces no romantic interest in his successor. Day in, day out, the Infanta Isabella skulks about the castle, dressing in black, singing bawdy ballads, and, worst of all, threatening to join the Holy Sisters in Toledo. Let her marry our Lord Jesus Christ in the next life—at the moment her duty is to marry Portugal!

Yet another lady-in-waiting has acquiesced to Ferdinand's advances. As soon as her transgression became apparent, I hurried the harlot and her nascent baby off to the nearest convent, though in truth I would have preferred to hurry the king off to the nearest monastery. (It is quite enough to make me regret that you and I be haved so honorably last April in my Segovian rose garden.) If there were chastity belts for men, I would this very night slip one over my husband's lecherous loins, lock it up, and hide the key where I alone can find it.

I am bored, sir. Nothing amuses me. Yesterday I attended a bullfight—an unrelievedly gory and grotesque spectacle. I have half a mind to outlaw the entire sport. This morning's auto-da-fé was equally jejune. Of the nineteen heretics paraded through the streets in *sambenitos*, eleven repented, seven went to the stake, and one dropped dead from fright. I left before the burnings, the weather having turned rainy and cold.

Cristóbal, you and you alone can relieve my tedium. You must visit these other Moluccas, teaching the Indians about eternal life, searching out *libertad*'s golden portal, and having many beguiling adventures. And

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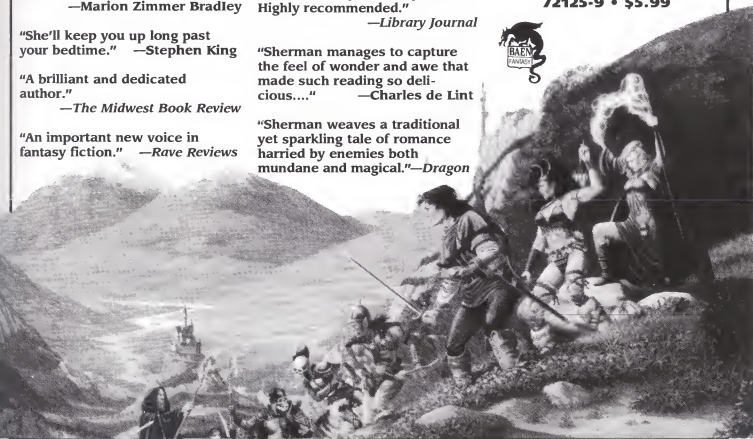
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Publisher's Note: *Castle of Deception* is set in the same literary universe as the bestselling computer adventure, *The Bard's Tale IV*. While novel and game are independent of each other, we believe familiarity with either will intensify the enjoyment of the other.

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★ **Distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, Ny 10020** ★

then, when you are finished, you must pick up your pen and excite me with your exploits.

Written in our City of Santa Fe on this seventeenth day of September, in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1492.

I, THE QUEEN

TO YOU, ISABELLA, by the Grace of God Queen of Castile, León, Aragón, etc., greetings and increase of good fortune.

Following your directive of the seventeenth, we have spent the past fourteen hours in quest of souls and gold, and I must tell you at the outset that no man has ever endured a more perplexing day.

The *Niña* has always been my favorite of the fleet, and certainly the ship best designed for exploring coasts, so with dawn's first light I transferred my flag to her, leaving Pinzón and his brothers in charge of the *Santa María* and the *Pinta*. Once Torres, Harana, and Father Hojeda were aboard, we took off, eventually dropping our anchor perhaps sixty yards off Manhattan. Setting out in the dinghy, we disembarked at a place called "Battery Park," unfurled our standard, and acquired the island for Spain.

We were immediately struck by the large number of beggars in our midst, men and women with dirty faces, torn clothing, hollow eyes, and vacant bellies. Poor as heretics' children, they carried all their earthly belongings about in sacks (rather like the Jews I noted traveling down the *Salts*), and we quickly identified them as the "homeless, typhoon-buffed" creatures named on the idol's plaque. An infinite remorse gripped me as I realized they were all destined to be skewered on the spikes of *libertad* and consumed by her flames.

Torres tried several times to start a conversation with these wretches, asking why they did not flee from Battery Park to whatever monasteries, convents, and sanctuaries might grace the interior. Their responses were invariably a crude idiomatic expression to the effect that Torres should forthwith become a hermaphrodite and experience self-contained sexual congress.

As if sensing our communication difficulties, a bold young Indian approached, offering his services as both interpreter and guide. Born Rodrigo Menendez, he said he was raised in the distant Spanish-speaking land of "Cuba-man." Though formidable in appearance, with a tiny gold ring through his right nostril, a dark blue kerchief tied around his forehead, and a shirt inscribed BEAM ME UP, SCOTTY, THERE'S NO INTELLIGENT LIFE DOWN HERE, he assured us he was of the Holy Faith, attending Mass regularly as well as something called "Cardinal O'Connor High School-man," situated on the Twenty-third Street. We offered to pay him in the various trinkets that appeal so profoundly to the African peoples with whom the Crown barter: red felt caps, glass necklaces, little brass bells. He was not interested. When we displayed the cask of vintage Marques de Cacaes that Father Hojeda had so cleverly brought ashore, however, the youth's eyes lit up like votive candles, and for this good consideration he entered our employ.

A tour of "Lower Manhattan," Rodrigo assured us, typically begins with "the New York Stock Exchange." From his description, we surmised it was a principal meeting place of the *libertad* cult. Steeling ourselves, we followed the youth east along the "Wall" road, site of many grand citadels and lofty towers. The passing Indians fairly dripped of gold—gold bracelets, gold wedding bands, gold chains about their necks, gold pebbles in their teeth.

We entered the temple in question. Believe me, Your Highness, rarely has a faith excited such zeal. Those who attend the New York Stock Exchange celebrate with a frenzy I have never seen before. They run around like lunatics and shout like the Apostles at Pentecost. It did not take Father Hojeda long to decide that these stock exchangers are nowise ready to hear about Jesus Christ, so tenacious are their present beliefs. I am inclined to concur.

As we left the temple, the utter strangeness of the surrounding city prompted me to speculate we might have reached the fabled waterbound kingdom of which Marco Polo wrote. I asked Rodrigo if we could possibly be on one of the Cipango Islands.

He said, "The which?"

"Cipango Islands. You know—the Japans."

Whereupon the youth explained that Cipango indeed possessed many "holdings" on Manhattan, including treasures, trading posts, and money-lending houses plus something called "Rockefeller Center-man." However, while these assorted enterprises evidently make Manhattan a kind of colony of Cipango, Rodrigo reckoned the actual Kingdom of Japan to be some considerable distance away.

"If we're not in Cipango, have we perhaps found Cathay?" asked Father Hojeda.

"Huh? Cathay?"

"Do you call it Quinsay? China, perhaps?"

"Ah—you want to see Chinatown!"

The youth guided us to an enclave consisting primarily of places to eat. It took us but a moment to realize that "Chinatown" is no more contiguous with Cathay than the money-lending houses are contiguous with Cipango. We did, however, enjoy an excellent lunch of pork, rice, and bamboo shoots. Rodrigo paid for this repast using the local currency, a debt we agreed to cover with a second cask of Marques de Cacaes.

"Our fervent hope was to form an alliance with the Great Khan," I explained to the youth, making no effort to hide my disappointment over the disparity between Chinatown and Cathay. "We bear a royal letter of recommendation from the King and Queen of Spain."

"The closest we got to a khan is the mayor," the youth answered, "but I don't think he worries a whole lot about where he stands with the King and Queen of Spain."

Through further questioning of Rodrigo, we learned that this "mayor" claims an African heritage, whereupon Father Hojeda and I decided it was probably most accurate to regard him as a local chieftain. Rodrigo offered to take us to the ruler's headquarters, a "City Hall-man" lying perhaps a half mile south of Chinatown. We accept-

ed. As we set out on our diplomatic mission, however, the youth casually mentioned that a previous such Chief of Manhattan had been of Jewish descent. Naturally I was not about to open negotiations with any realm whose throne has held the avaricious assassins of Christ—not without explicit orders from Your Highness.

“We would like to see the sources of the gold,” I said to Rodrigo.

The youth replied, “Gold? Yeah, sure, I can show you some gold.”

“We would also like to see the gems,” added Harana.

“And the spices,” added Torres.

“And the precious fabrics,” added Father Hojeda.

“We go uptown-man,” said the youth. “We take the subway, eh?”

These “subways” proved to be machines most terrible and terrifying: self-propelled coaches linked in serpentine configurations, racing through underground passageways at demonic speeds. All during the trip Rodrigo engaged in a long, rambling, unsolicited speech to the effect that while he doesn’t question the sanctity of marriage, he is just as glad his parents got divorced, and while he admits the wrongfulness of thwarting semen on its journey, he would never leave home without a pocketful of penis sheaths, and while he understands that extracting fetuses from the womb is a sin, he doesn’t know how he’d react if his girlfriend, Martina, ever became pregnant by him. O my dear Isabella, it would seem that, before we attempt to convert this city’s Indians to Catholicism, we must first seek to convert its Catholics to Catholicism.

Reaching the “Pennsylvania” station via the “Seventh Avenue Local,” we climbed back to the surface and followed our guide north to a place where he promised we would see the precious fabrics. He spoke the truth. All the way from the Thirty-fourth Street to the Fortieth, nimble Indian peasants transported silks, satins, cashmere, velvet, gossamer, chenille, damask, and a hundred other exotic cloths (including a wrinkleproof material known as polyester), shutting them about in the form of both uncut bolts and finished suits. At the moment I cannot say exactly what trading opportunities this bazaar may offer Spain. We saw many Jews.

“What about the gold?” asked Harana.

“This way,” said Rodrigo, pointing north. “Gold, silver, gems.”

He took us to “the Jewelry District,” on the Forty-seventh Street near the “Avenue of the Americas.” Again, the youth knew whereof he spoke. Treasure lay everywhere, nearly all of it under the jurisdiction of Jews wearing dreadlocks, grotesque hats, and long black coats. We must not take anything, Rodrigo cautioned us. If we tried to remove the gold, the *policía* would intervene, presumably cutting off our hands and feet in the manner, my Queen, of your Santa Hermandad.

“Are the spices near?” asked Harana.

“Bit of a hike,” said the youth. “You up for it?”

Our party traveled west, then north on the “Broadway” road to “Columbus Circle,” locus of an idol bearing a singularly pleasing countenance, then higher still to the

Eighty-first Street, where we found ourselves at the source of the spices. Even from the sidewalk we could smell them: cloves, nutmeg, anise, cinnamon, thyme, ginger, basil—a thousand and one Oriental delights, wafting into our nostrils like the expirations of angels.

Then we saw the name.

Zabar’s.

“Jews?” I inquired.

“Jews,” the youth confirmed.

We did not go inside.

Dearest Isabella, could it possibly be that your Second Exodus beat us across the Ocean Sea? Did your ministers by some strange quirk equip the exiled infidels with ships faster even than the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*?

I am back in my cabin now, scribbling by the light of a full moon, a perfect sphere that sails the sky like a burning pomegranate. The tide is rising in Upper New York Bay, lifting my flagship up and down on her hawser like a ball riding atop the snout of a Bronx Zoo seal. The harbor air scrapes my throat, burns my chest, and brings tears to my eyes.

You must advise us, Sovereign Queen. These Spice Islands confound our minds and confuse our souls. Should we confiscate the gold? Lay claim to the silks and spices? Present our credences at City Hall-man? Attempt to convert the stock exchangers? What?

Written aboard the caraval *Santa María* on this twenty-second day of September, in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1492.

I, THE ADMIRAL

TO YOU, DON CRISTÓBAL COLÓN, our Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy and Governor of all the Islands to be found by you on your Great Voyage of Discovery, greetings and grace.

Forgive my tardiness in answering, but we have recently uprooted our court, the food supplies in Santa Fe having become depleted and its latrines full, with the result that your communique of the twenty-second went momentarily astray.

What twisted wind, what perverted current has brought you to the city of which you speak? How are we to account for such a mad and upside-down dominion, this Manhattan where Jews prosper, prevail, and place themselves upon thrones? You are not in Asia, Cristóbal.

A consensus has emerged here. My King, my councillors, and my heart all agree. You must not linger another moment in that Satanic place. Leave, friend. We have no use for Manhattan’s filthy gold. We do not seek its tarnished silver, tainted gems, rancid spices, rotten silks.

Predictably, Santángel offers a voice of dissent. He wants you to stay on Manhattan and learn how a city without *limpieza de sangre* has accomplished so many marvels. I believe it is the Jew in him talking. No matter. My wish, not his, is your command.

Take the next tide, Admiral. Pull up your anchor, sail

south, and don't stop till you've found a world that makes some sense.

Written in our City of Barcelona on this first day of October, in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1492.

I, THE QUEEN

TO YOU, ISABELLA, by the Grace of God Queen of Castile, León, Aragón, etc., greetings and increase of good fortune.

It is my supreme pleasure to report that your royal intuitions were correct. We quit New York within an hour of your letter's arrival, returning to the Ocean Sea and heading due south as you so wisely instructed. Once again the waves became like mountains, and once again we followed them to our destiny. On October twelfth, after a journey of six days, an exhilarating cry of "*Tierra!*" issued from my lookout.

The island we found that afternoon bore little resemblance to Manhattan. It had no citadels, subways, beggars, or Chinese inns. We came ashore on a pristine expanse of gleaming white coral, beyond which lay a jungle so lush and green we thought immediately of Eden before the Fall. When the natives appeared, at first simply peering out from among the trees, then walking down to the beach to greet us, we were further reminded of the Golden Age. They were gentle beyond telling, peaceful beyond belief, and naked as the day God made them. Unlike Rodrigo back on Manhattan, they eagerly accepted our gifts, placing the red felt caps on their heads, draping the glass necklaces atop their bare bosoms, and jangling the little brass bells like children. They call their world Guanahaní, but we forthwith named it San Salvador after Him whose infinite mercy brought us here.

Have we at last reached Asia? I cannot say. There are many beautiful islands in this part of creation. We have given them all Spanish names—Hispaniola, Santa María la Antigua, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Santa Cruz—so God will know from which nation this Holy Endeavor proceeds. In every case the natives have proved as docile and prelapsarian as those on San Salvador. They are ignorant of horse and ox, innocent of wheel, plow, and musket. Beyond the occasional juju clutched in a brown fist or amulet slung about a sunbaked neck, we find no evidence of religion here. Say the word, and Father Hojeda will begin the baptisms.

At the moment I am on Hispaniola, watching a dozen maidens frolic in the clear blue waters of a bay called Acul. As the sun descends, it turns the girls' bare skin the very color of the bronze swords with which we shall keep these people in check. Have I arrived in Paradise, my Queen?

Written aboard the caraval *Santa María* on this sev-

enteenth day of October, in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1492.

I, THE ADMIRAL

TO YOU, DON CRISTÓBAL COLÓN, our Admiral of the Ocean Sea, Viceroy and Governor of all the Islands to be found by you on your Great Voyage of Discovery, greetings and grace.

Friar Deza says Spain is now "on the threshold of a grand and glorious age." Father Torquemada thinks we stand "on the verge of a Thousand Year Empire such as the world has never known."

They may be right. Six days ago Emanuel I of Portugal asked for the Infanta Isabella's hand in marriage, and she dutifully accepted. The day after that the Islamic king Boabdil surrendered the keys to the Alhambra, and our victory over the Moors became complete. Then, twenty-four hours later, your missive arrived from Hispaniola.

O my Admiral, the belief here is that, if you are not in the Indies, you have come upon something no less valuable for Spain, a great pool of unclaimed souls both ripe for conversion and ready to relieve Castile of all strenuous and unseemly labor. When I read your letter to my councillors, a cheer resounded throughout the palace, and before long we were all drinking the same vintage of Marques de Caçares with which you bargained in Manhattan.

Santángel did not join our celebration. He says Torquemada's Thousand Year Empire will last no more than a few centuries. "In fleeing Manhattan, Spain has made a fatal mistake," he insists. "By running away to Hispaniola, Don Cristóbal has merely bought the Crown some time."

Last night a violent and frightening vision afflicted my sleep. Like the Golem of Jewish folklore, the idol of *libertad* had by some miracle come to life and had by no less a miracle betaken herself to Europe. So heavy were her footfalls that the very mountains of Spain commenced to tremble, then to crack apart, then to collapse upon themselves like ancient Atlantis sinking into the waters beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

What do you make of my dream, Cristóbal? Could it be that Santángel is right, and the best you can do for Spain is buy her some time? Very well. Amen. Empire is the art of the possible.

So baptize those brown natives, dear sailor. Put them to work. Punish those who cling to their fetishes and rites. And buy Spain some time, O my Admiral. Buy her some time.

Written in our City of Barcelona on this twenty-third day of October, in the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 1492.

I, THE QUEEN

♦

Spare Time for Willy Todd

Marcos Donnelly

"So maybe what we call imaginary time is really more basic, and what we call real is just an idea that we invent to help us describe what we think the universe is like."

—Stephen W. Hawking

Willy Todd stares down Sequoia Boulevard. The street is pitch because it rained an hour ago. The wet pavement swallows illumination from the few street lights that haven't been broken yet. There are no johns wandering tonight, not his kind, but Willy Todd keeps looking. Candy Bear said there'd be a heavyweight sent here, and that's a variation Willy Todd wants to see.

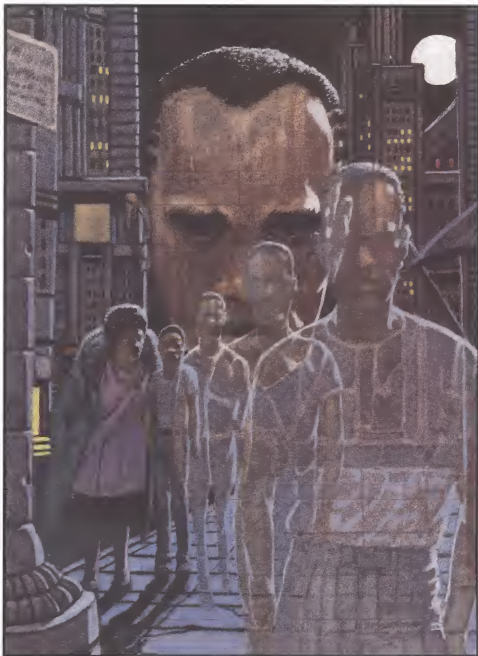


Illustration by Janet Aulisio

There's the hooker, the woman, down the boulevard. Willy Todd watches her closely. But no. She's still standard, simple sex-for-money. She's old enough to be his mother, and he laughs when he thinks that.

Mamma says, "Go fast, sweetie," and I do, I go real fast.

He hates that memory. That was years ago and it still bites fresh in his mind when he remembers. His stomach tightens. Willy Todd is sixteen years old, now, this week, this time, April 1999; he knows he should be getting over things like that. But he can't. "Go fast," she always said. "Go fast," and I click to fast—I click her to slow, really, she never understood that—and the smoke from her cigarette just stops, starched cotton in the air, and I take my time—that strikes him now, sad and funny—and pick up all the asbrays, all the beer cans from last night's visitor. I sweep and dust and when it's done I click out and let the cigarette smoke go on. It uncurls, and Mamma is still asking, because I'm so fast it takes her a second to see I'm all done.

"Love your Mamma, son," his father said when Willy Todd was nine. Then his father flickered out. Father had never learned to control it. Father would keep shooting ahead, sometimes a day, sometimes a week, once for an entire three months. That time, the time he said, "Love your Mamma, son," Father flickered out and didn't ever come back. He'd gone far, Willy Todd knew after a while. Farther than Willy Todd has ever been. Which is all right with Willy Todd.

The old hooker down the road scores the john just then, the shabby-looking guy in the beat-up '92 Isuzu. Same guy as always; Willy Todd has seen it ten or twelve times before, this very night in April 1999. The guy is a cop, and, just like every other time, he busts her when she offers more than just a party. He frisks her for a long time; then the squad car with rollers flashing pulls up Sequoia Boulevard. Willy Todd has never tried to warn her, not ever. He hates her because she always brings back the memory of his mother. Willy Todd knows that isn't fair of him. What the fuck, though. Just what the fuck.

Willy Todd's temporal neighborhood—that's what he calls it—runs from March 15, 1996, exactly one year after he'd clicked out of the doctor's office, through January 9, 2003. The cutoff date is arbitrary, he tells himself. His own choice, a national holiday, President Demering's birthday. He's never gone further ahead. (Further or farther? For Willy Todd, that's a hard distinction.) There are too many others like him past that point in history, too many more like him who'd started jumping, switching, slowing, speeding; a lot of confusion. That's what he's heard. Not many of them come back here, though—most of them can't handle trips backward.

So back here he can be alone. He can think. Any further (farther?) back in time and he would have to deal with his mother again. Any further (farther?) ahead, he runs the risk of meeting his father. Not for certain, since he doesn't know where his father landed, but he knows it isn't here, in this temporal neighborhood. And that's just fine with Willy Todd.

The squad car pulls away with the hooker, and the '92 Isuzu follows. They'll book her, she'll do time. Just a couple days, until her pimp misses her and comes to bail her out. She just sells sex. If she were like Willy Todd—if she were a time swapper, a jumper—it'd be different. The Demering Administration Executive Act XII of 1997 mandated that time-swapping be penalized by life imprisonment.

Which is, in the end, absurd. Willy Todd could do life in an afternoon and still be out in time for supper. So who did the Demering Administration think they were scaring? When Willy Todd was growing up (the first time, the time he remembers being first), there hadn't even been a Demering Administration. But somewhere in all the jumping and overlapping and slingshotting he'd been doing, he found himself remembering a newer memory, one where Demering was president. But he remembered the older memory, too. So somebody, some other jumper, must have gone back and caused Demering to become president. Maybe by accident, maybe on purpose. Either way, it was a stupid thing to do.

Not that it matters one bit to Willy Todd.

The rusted muffler of Candy Bear's car is unmistakable—a vibrating rattle in first gear followed by a rising whine at each upshift. After bright police flashers and rollers, Candy Bear's headlights are pathetic; the soaked roadway sucks in most of the glare, and two fatigued blotches of circular yellow obediently precede the car along the boulevard, doing little else about the darkness.

Candy Bear is dark, too. She gets out of the car, hoists all two hundred pounds of herself above a pair of fragile ankles, small feet. The contrast of it, the impossibility of so much balanced on so little, has always intrigued Willy Todd. He admires Candy Bear. He understands her.

"Look at your clothes!" she says. "And on a night like this! You'll catch your death, Willy Todd." Willy Todd smiles; he's wearing jeans and a white tee shirt, and he realizes he does feel cold. Candy Bear has brought a coat, something she started doing on this night about five times ago.

Candy Bear has a straight time-line, but she knows all of Willy Todd's trips through. Willy Todd has spent a long time within the boundaries of his temporal neighborhood—jumping ahead, looping back, usually landing at random dates. He lets Candy Bear know his temporal neighborhood—not physically, really, but in her awareness. Not a lot of people can do that, people who aren't jumpers themselves. But some are special. Candy Bear is special. Right now, for example, she's only known him for two weeks of real time. But she remembers *all* the times, all the overlaps, all the repeats, right from the first time they met near this same street corner, she picking him up, cleaning him and doctoring him after a particularly nasty beating he'd gotten from some bored Federal Marshals. So the two of them are old, old friends. She's good at juggling the temporal inconsistencies of a jumper. The talent for that comes (Willy long ago decided) from a lifetime spent balancing so much weight on such small ankles.

Candy Bear dies on January 9, 2003. On President Demering's birthday, the day of the Demering riots.

There were three men with him in the doctor's office on March 15, 1995, the day he decided to click out for good into his own time boundaries: the psychiatrist, the physicist, and the government agent.

Willy Todd was twelve.

"We don't need a physicist," the psychiatrist was shouting at the government agent. "What we need is a top neurologist. Everything points to a brain disorder."

The physicist sneered. "Brain disorder? These people jump ahead in time, for God's sake! They flicker and go, snap, like that, violating the basis of natural law. You sum it up as a *synapse* problem?"

Willy Todd gnawed at a fingernail.

The government agent sat very relaxed. "Doctors, please. The President asked me to bring order to this investigation. You make it difficult."

The psychiatrist clenched a fist. "A proper methodology—"

"A proper methodology," said the government man, "involves cooperation. There are over two hundred professionals involved in this investigation. Demographers, geneticists, radiation experts"—he glared at the psychiatrist—"neurologists. Do I need to go back to President Demering and report turf wars?"

Both doctors became quiet at the mention of the President's name. Willy Todd liked the way the government man could control them so easily.

"Good. Now I want answers. We started with sixty-seven of these people, and we're already down to twenty-three. If they keep disappearing into the future on us at this rate . . ." He didn't finish. They all seemed to know what that meant.

"Like my father," Willy Todd said. They noticed him again. "He just couldn't control himself."

The government agent smiled at him. "We want to make it so you know how to control it, son."

"I'm fine," Willy Todd said, and then he stared at the psychiatrist. "I'm not the one who needs to learn how to control himself."

The psychiatrist looked very uncomfortable.

"Go fast, sweetie!" Mamma says to me. She's yelled for me to come running, and she's naked under the bed covers, this time with the psychiatrist. These days she usually has someone there, whether my father has disappeared again or not. I click everything to stop and walk slowly out to my father's car. It's just coming in the driveway. I let all of the air out of the back left tire. He'll put the spare on before he comes in the house.

I do something different every time my father almost catches her with someone. If my father had more control of himself, he'd notice I've clicked everything to stop. I wouldn't be able to get away with it. But he doesn't have control, so I'll always be able to stall him and buy time for the psychiatrist (or whomever) to get dressed and pretend he's stopped by just to ask more questions.

* * *

"Do you feel like you'll ever be able to control it, Willy Todd?" The government man sat down in the chair beside him.

Willy Todd folded his hands and stared down at them. "I do control it," he said. "Backwards and forwards."

The physicist smiled. "He's young. It confuses him." But the government agent leaned toward Willy Todd, interested.

"Backwards?" he asked.

Willy Todd nodded, and then showed him.

The physicist smiled. "He's young. It confuses him." But the government agent leaned toward Willy Todd, interested.

"Backwards?" he asked.

Willy Todd nodded, and then showed him.

The physicist smiled. "He's young. It confuses him." But the government agent leaned toward Willy Todd, interested.

"Backwards?" he asked.

Willy Todd shook his head. "No. Not really. I can't control any of it."

The physicist and psychiatrist nodded and went on talking about their plans and investigations. The government agent's eyes were a little wider, and Willy Todd could tell he was trying to sort it out.

It took Candy Bear and Willy Todd a few tries to figure out how to work the business right. The first person they'd sent back—a middle-aged guy whose wife had caught him having an affair two months earlier—had paid them three hundred dollars. Willy Todd gave the money to Candy Bear, but then after the next jump he'd discovered he'd erased it all, every cent. The man had gone back, ended the affair before his wife found out, then never needed to go back in the first place (although he remembered; he remembered well, Willy Todd was sure), and all Willy Todd and Candy Bear had to show for it was a shared memory. So they worked it out: Willy Todd would send the people back with instructions to pay *after* the back-launch, back then before they'd ever needed help. Generally that worked. A few had decided not to pay at all, but Willy could take care of that. Anything done and undone could be redone. It was all a matter of controlling the loops and the launches and the memories.

Candy Bear was a little richer each time he looped back to the beginning.

"We've got a real spender coming tonight," Candy Bear says, tonight on Sequoia Boulevard, April 1999. She pulls out a comb and works it through Willy Todd's hair, right there on the street corner. "I scored the deal and settled it over a *quite* fine dinner at one of them fancy joints on Park Lane." She tosses her head like a proud, young flirt, and grins. "He'll be here in just a few minutes."

"This is a strange variation," Willy Todd says. "Does it feel strange to you?" As each minute goes by, he feels sadder and sadder. That's the only way he can describe it to himself.

Candy Bear stops combing and concentrates. Willy

Todd lets her into his temporal awareness—he runs all the times by her mind again. She looks concerned now.

"You're right, boy," she says quietly. "It feels unusual, but I couldn't even tell you how."

"How much time he want?"

"Didn't say, sugar. But he's dropping fifteen grand for it."

Willy Todd is shocked. He's time-swapped a lot of people over the years—his years, the Willy Todd years spent in the temporal neighborhood—but Candy Bear had never been able to negotiate anyone higher than three thousand. And those were the exceptions, usually the politicians who needed to go back to pre-campaign or corporate CEO-types who needed to swing back before some deal or scandal ever happened. Most of the time Candy Bear took in charity cases for a few hundred dollars: unwed, pregnant fundamentalist girls swung back to pre-conception; burned-out sailors launched back to the beginning of shore leave; guilt-ridden drunk drivers to the day before they'd killed someone. Those swaps were always easy. He'd swing the john back three or four months, and the slingshot would send Willy Todd forward the same amount of time. Willy Todd would land, his mind unchanged but his body a little older. From there, Willy Todd had to work back toward go; a few months, a few innocent bystanders, at a time.

Very few johns were customers twice. Once back in their earlier bodies, they remembered, they corrected, they repented.

Willy Todd has worked on eliminating the slingshot kickback, trying to keep his own time stable while sending the johns back. It doesn't work yet. Outside of saving a few hours, he's never been able to control it.

That angers him. He tries not to think about it.

"Think about this," the psychiatrist said to the physicist and the government agent. "The progression of time is relative to perception. Perception is a function of the mind. The mind is an expression of the brain. That's the link between the spatial and the temporal: the expression of the mind through the brain. If some mutation has altered the way these people experience the perception of time, then we have physical cause for temporal aberrations."

"Christ Almighty," the physicist said. "Then you'd just have people seeing things at different speeds. That doesn't even begin to explain how their bodies jump forward in time. There *has* to be some external cause for the physical transfer."

Very quietly, looking directly at Willy Todd, the government man said, "Does there?"

"Of course," said the physicist, and he walked to the chalkboard. "But look at what we have, out of our entire population of jumpers. A: Time controllers who make the world around them slow down. B: Time controllers who make the world around them speed up. C: Time jumpers who disappear and reappear later, having aged exactly the amount of time they've been gone. D: Time jumpers who reappear without having aged a second. E: Time jumpers who have *never* reappeared, perhaps

switching into some alternate universe. F: Time jumpers who are confused about past history, as if somehow the entire universe has been rewound and played out in a slightly different way. G, and this is really scary: Time swappers, who can force someone backwards in their lives the exact amount the swapper jumps forward. A slingshot effect sometimes happens at a jump, sometimes doesn't. We have eight verified cases."

"And the ones who themselves go backwards," said the government man, still looking at Willy Todd. Willy Todd smiled at him.

"That isn't certain yet," said the physicist. "There aren't any verified cases."

"No, there aren't. And I suppose we don't want to find any, since it would make things just that much more confusing. We're dying to find a pattern here, gentlemen, because then we'll have a theory we can control. But maybe there is no pattern. Maybe this is a transition stage, with time trying to find a better way to interact with people."

"That's goddamn metaphysics," said the physicist.

"Parapsychology," said the psychologist.

"I like it," said Willy Todd, and they all looked at him.

"I like it, too, Willy Todd." The government man put a hand on Willy Todd's shoulder. "Time running amok and trying to settle into people's needs and perceptions. Time trying to find someone to control it. And all those someone's trying to control time."

"You're just building in more contradictions—"

"Look at your own chalkboard, doctors. Each fact contradicts another fact. Hell, some of your facts are contradictory all by themselves. Your only pattern is diversity. A random struggle between man and time to establish a new pattern. What do you think, Willy Todd?"

Willy Todd squirmed in his chair. "I can go backwards if I want to. And I can send other people backwards if I want to." He stopped, but then decided to go on. "And there are some people who can understand the . . . awareness. People who can't jump. People whose minds can understand that yesterday went one way and it also went another way. They don't take for granted that there is only one before, one now, one later."

The physicist threw his chalk to the floor and crossed his arms. The psychiatrist muttered something Willy Todd couldn't entirely hear, something about contradictions and variables.

"Please, Willy Todd, send me back. Send me back fast." Which means she knows I can do that if I want. But she's the one who took all the pills. She's the one who decided, since she couldn't control her life, to take control of her own death. That was her choice, and she's dying for it. Now she wants me to send her back so she can stop it.

Well, just let her die. It's the only thing she's ever even tried to control. Just let her die.

"What do you think, Willy Todd?" the government man asked. "Does it feel like something controlling you from the inside, or does it feel like something taking over from the outside?"

Willy Todd scowled and decided right then. "Inside," he said. "Control should be something from the inside. I mean, everything can seem confusing if you think too hard. If you can live with the contradictions in your own head, why should that be a problem? You just control it." The government man looked very surprised, then, when he felt Willy Todd pull him into the temporal awareness. Willy Todd hooked to him, and then launched himself six years ahead using the slingshot. Which meant, of course, that the government agent was launched to six years younger in his own past.

Willy Todd was startled when he landed—his new height, the body hair, now an eighteen-year-old with a twelve-year-old's mind. He had aged on this jump, aged exactly the same amount of time he'd launched forward. It bothered him, and he felt awkward in the older Willy Todd body. He found a bum in an alley off Sequoia Boulevard, and he launched the bum two years ahead, himself back to age sixteen. That was better. That felt more comfortable, at least for his first time going so far.

That first time was years ago. Willy Todd time.

Candy Bear knows she'll die in the Demering Day riots of 2003. There is no way Willy Todd can hide it from her. It's one of the strongest elements of his own temporal awareness. They argue often about her death, of course. He wants to save her from it, to launch ahead and pull her from the police lines and the bullets. But she'll have nothing changed. Candy Bear is firm that way—acceptance is part of her control. It seems like a contradiction when Willy Todd thinks about it too hard. It's another reason he respects her.

Which did not keep him from trying, once. He'd found an elderly man strolling down Sequoia Boulevard, and Willy Todd had launched the man backwards seven years and ridden the slingshot directly to the day of the riots. He came up behind Candy Bear, and she knew, without turning around to look, that he was there. "Don't even think it, sugar," she said over her shoulder.

The sign she carried said, "End The Demering Regime! Equal Rights For All Americans!"

Someone else's sign said, "Break The Control!"

Willy Todd ran away. Seeing her die once had already been too much.

It was, of course, like losing a mother.

The car drives up Sequoia Boulevard, and both Candy Bear and Willy Todd look. It's a Hyundai Luxury XII, the most expensive model offered by any dealership in 1999.

Willy Todd's father steps out of the car. Older, of course, than when Willy last saw him, back outside Willy Todd's temporal neighborhood when Willy was nine. The man is dressed well, unshaven, and looks nervous. A bit manic, even. But definitely Willy Todd's father.

Vaguely, Willy Todd realizes he is not surprised, not at all.

"This the one?" the man says to Candy Bear in a hurried way, and then to Willy Todd, "Can you send me back?"

Willy Todd nods. His father does not recognize the

sixteen-year-old. For this man, there is only the nine-year-old back in 1992.

"How far you going?" asks Willy Todd, as if he needed to.

"Late 1992. Let's just do it, please."

"Got a particular month and day in mind?"

Willy Todd's father looks confused. "You can do that? Down to the day?"

"Down to the minute," says Willy Todd.

Candy Bear tenses and gets defensive. "You doubting my boy? You calling him a liar?"

"Not No, not at all." Willy Todd's father is flustered and apologetic. "It's just . . . Well, I've been as far ahead as 2017 where there are thousands of jumpers. None of them was able to pinpoint a landing with that much accuracy."

"Well, they're there and I'm here," Willy Todd says.

"And so are you, pal. I can't take the job."

Both Father and Candy Bear are shaken by that one.

"It's outside my parameters. I'd get a slingshot reaction that carries me all the way to 2006. I won't go that far."

A car drives by, its wheels on the wet pavement sounding like a slow tearing of the boulevard itself, a casual rip down the middle of Willy Todd's world. He looks at Candy Bear. Her lips are tight. But 2006 is a year without Candy Bear, a rest-of-the-world without her. Not that he couldn't work his way back. But to even *be* there. He wouldn't.

"Sugar, do some thinking," she says. She knows why he won't go, and he can tell she respects it. She thinks it's wrong, but she respects it. She doesn't realize how deep it goes, though. For Willy Todd, she is a focal point, a center to his world, a source of strength and control.

Inside, Willy Todd had said to the government agent. *Control should be something from the inside.*

"Give me a reason," Willy Todd orders his father.

Candy Bear nods once and steps back.

"My family," says Willy Todd's father. "I was an uncontrolled jumper and I left them behind in 1992. I've got a wife and a little boy back there, and I haven't been able to find either one of them in the future. I think they were lost during the Demering Administration."

"Tell me about the world in 2006." Willy Todd looks over at Candy Bear. "Tell me what good the Demering Day riots did."

Willy Todd's father grows uneasy still. "Why the hell do you want to know so much?"

Willy Todd doesn't look over to him. He keeps staring at Candy Bear. She crosses her arms and scowls. "Just tell me about the massacre," he says.

Willy Todd's father gives a snort. "Can you believe it? The whole future is screwed up. Some jumpers went renegade and launched back to change politics, tried to ease up the prejudice against the jumper population. They made it worse for themselves. Kept Demering in power until his death."

"The Demering Day riots," Willy Todd says again.

"The Regime's over now," says Willy Todd's father. "I

mean *then*, in 2006. After the massacres of '03, there was more and more killing. A year of killing. The administration couldn't hold onto its authority. It was a tremendous loss of face. Even the army turned on them. By '06 it's still a mess, but it gets better year over year. Now can we go?"

Candy Bear makes no effort to hide a smile of triumph, self-justification. Her stance, the purse in her lips, everything about her says, "You see, sugar? That's control."

Willy Todd understands even better now why he loves the woman.

He grabs his father by the shirt collar. "If you ever learn self-control, try to pass a little bit of the idea on to your wife, mister."

His father looks shocked and ready to throw a punch, but just then Willy Todd opens his temporal awareness to him. All the trips, all the memories and overlapping jumps; all of it in one burst of connection. His father's eyes widen. "Son?" he says. "Willy Todd?"

"Learn to control it and you can build yourself a better universe, Daddy."

Willy Todd's father isn't able to handle so many memories and so much anger, that's obvious. "But it's not my fault, son! It's out of my hands!"

"Yeah, sure," Willy says. He launches.

But not for seven years. For four, direct again for January 9, 2003, 8:45 in the morning. That would land his father about two months before his mother's suicide. Two months for both of them to learn a little, and a second chance at control.

Because of Candy Bear's triumphant smile, Willy Todd has decided they deserve another shot.

On Sequoia Boulevard in 2003, he walks up behind Candy Bear where she stands on the picket line.

"Don't even think it, sugar," she says over her shoulder. He feels a part of him that one time ran away after that, but he erases it and stays.

"Just wanted to see you," Willy Todd says.

She turns and smiles big. Around them are thousands of people gathering from the outskirts, heading in toward City Hall. They won't get that far, Willy Todd knows, just as Candy Bear knows. The police, the civil guard, and Demering's Federal Marshals are already coming. It's the same story in twenty or thirty other major cities across the country, but this is the only place and time that Candy Bear dies.

"Take care of yourself, boy," she says. "Now get along. And don't you ever go backwards again, Willy Todd. That's a fool's way out, and I should have known it all along and told you so."

She turns without saying good-bye. Willy Todd walks the other way. When the shooting starts, he begins to run, hard, fast, and blind.

He runs right into the government agent he had launched off of eight years ago. Tattered clothing, tired eyes, and a sign he dropped when Willy Todd ran into him: "When Did Freedom Disappear? Civil Rights Now!"

"You okay?" He helps Willy Todd up and looks at him funny, like he's trying to remember if he knows Willy somehow.

"I'm okay," Willy Todd says.

"C'mon," says the government agent, taking Willy Todd by the arm. "We've got to hide. Things are going to get really nasty around here."

"Yeah," says Willy Todd.

It would be easy, so easy, to lock the man into the awareness, and to launch off him back to the temporal neighborhood, back to Candy Bear and back to where he felt complete control. It would be better for both of them: The government agent would slingshot forward into safer times of returning democracy.

Willy Todd doesn't do it. He runs side by side with the man, into this world here. It's time for Willy Todd to be someplace, to be sometime. Candy Bear is behind him dying, in control of herself and changing things her way. Willy Todd likes that about her. He always has. It's time. ♦

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Prisons

**Kevin J. Anderson
and
Doug Beason**

I am still called the Warden. The prisoners consider it an ironic jest.

Barely a meter square, the forcewalls form the boundaries of my holographic body. Once this felt like a throne, an isolated position from which I could control the workings of Bastille. Now, though, I must look out and watch my former prisoners laughing at me.

This projection has been an image of authority to them. Since living on this prison world was too great a punishment to inflict upon any real warden or guards, my Artificial Personality was entrusted to watch over this compound. I am based on a real person—a great man, I think—a proud man with many accomplishments. But I have failed here.

Amu led the prisoners in their revolt; he convinced them that Bastille is a self-sufficient planet after all their forced terraforming work for the Federation. They have survived all Federation attempts to reoccupy the world, keeping the invaders out with the same systems once intended to keep the prisoners in. Besides the prisoners, I am the only one left.

Once, I ran the environmental systems here, the production accounting, the resources inven-



Illustration by Gary Freeman

tory. I monitored the automated digging and processing machinery outside. I controlled the fleet of tiny piranha interceptors in orbit that would destroy any ship trying to escape. But now I am powerless.

Amu's lover Theowane comes to taunt me every day, to gloat over her triumph. She paces up and down the corridor outside the forcewalls. To me, she is flaunting her freedom to go where she wishes. I do not think it is unintentional.

At the time of the revolt, Theowane used her computer skills to introduce a worm program that rewrote the control links around my Personality, leaving me isolated and helpless. If I attempt to regain control, the worm will delete my existence. I feel as if I have a knife at my throat, and I am too afraid to act.

At moments such as this, I can appreciate the sophistication of my Personality, which allows me to feel the full range of human emotions.

It allows me to hate Theowane and what she has done to me.

Theowane makes herself smile, but the Warden refuses to look at her. It annoys her when he broods like this.

"I am busy," he says.

Leaving him to dwell on his fate, Theowane crosses to the panorama window. Huge, remotely driven excavators and haulers churn the ground, rearing up, crunching rock and digesting it for usable minerals. *At least, she thinks, Bastille's resources are put to our own use, not exported for someone else.*

Lavender streaks mottle the indigo sky, blotting out all but the brightest stars. A dime-sized glare shows the distant sun, too far away to heat the planet to any comfortable temperature; but overhead, dominating the sky, rides the cinnamon-colored moon Antoinette, so close to Bastille and so nearly the same size that it keeps the planet heated by tidal flexing.

On some of the nearby rocks, patches of algae and lichen have taken hold. These have been genetically engineered to survive in Bastille's environment, to begin the long-term conversion of the surface and the atmosphere. On a human timescale, though, they are making little progress.

Farther below, Theowane sees the oily surface of the deadly sea, where clumps of the *ubermindist* weed drift. A few floating harvesters ride the waves, but the corrosive water and the sulfuric-acid vapor in the air cause too much damage to send them out often. That does not matter, since the rebels have decided not to use the drug as a bargaining chip. Amu has refused to continue exporting *ubermindist* extract, despite a black market clamoring for it. The prisoners are independent now, with no need for external help.

Theowane finds it bitterly ironic that she and so many others sentenced here for drug crimes had been forced by the Federation to process *ubermindist*. The Federation supports its own black market trade, keeping the drug illegal and selling it at the same time. After taking over the prison planet, Amu cut off the supply, using the piranha interceptors to destroy an outgoing robot

ship laden with *ubermindist*. The Federation has gone without their precious addictive drug since the revolt.

When the intruder alarms suddenly kick in, they take Theowane by surprise. She whirls and places both hands on her hips. Her close-cropped reddish hair remains perfectly in place.

"What is it?" she demands of the Warden.

He is required to answer. "One ship, unidentified, has just snapped out of hyperspace. It is on approach." The Warden's image straightens as he speaks, lifting his head and reciting the words in an inflectionless voice.

"Activate the piranha swarm," she says.

The Warden turns to her. "Let me contact the ship first. We must see who they are."

"No!" Bastille has been quarantined by the rest of the Federation. Any approaching ship can only mean trouble.

Shortly after the prison revolt, the Praesidentrix had tried to negotiate with Bastille. Then she sent laughable threats by subspace radio, demanding that Amu surrender under threat of "severe punishment." The threats grew more strident over the weeks, then months.

Finally, after the sudden death of her consort in some unrelated accident, the Praesidentrix became brutal and unforgiving. The man's death had apparently shocked her to the core. The negotiator turned dictator against the upstart prisoners.

She sent an armada of warships to retake Bastille. Theowane had been astonished, not thinking this hell-hole worth such a massed effort. Amu had turned loose the defenses of the prison planet itself. The piranha swarm—so effective at keeping the prisoners trapped inside—proved just as efficient at keeping the armada out. The piranhas destroyed twelve Dreadnoughts that attempted to make a landing; two others fled to high orbit, then out through the hyperspace node.

But Amu is certain that the Praesidentrix, especially in her grieving, unstable state, will never give up so easily. "Piranha defenses armed and unleashed," the Warden says.

Five of the fingerprint-smeared screens beside the Warden's projection tank crackle and wink on. Viewing through the eyes of the closest piranha interceptors, Theowane sees different views of the approaching ship, sleek yet clunky-looking, a paradox of smooth angles and bulky protuberances.

"Incoming audio," the Warden says. "Transmission locked. Video in phase and verified."

The largest screen swirls, belches static, then congeals into a garish projection of the ship's command chamber. The captain falls out of focus; he is sitting too close to the bridge projection cameras.

"—in peace, for PEACE, we bring our message of happiness and hope to Bastille. We come to help. We come to offer you the answers."

Theowane recognizes the metallic embroidered chasuble on the captain's shoulders, the pseudo-robe uniforms of the other crew visible in the background. She snorts at the acronym.

PEACE—Passive Earth Assembly for Cosmic Enlightenment, a devout group that combines quantum physics

and Eastern philosophy into, from what Theowane has heard, an incomprehensible but pleasant-sounding mishmash of ideas. It has appealed to many dissatisfied scientists, ones who gave up trying to understand the universe. PEACE has grown because of their willingness to settle raw worlds, places with such great hardship that no one in his right mind would live there voluntarily.

Theowane sees it already: once word got out of the prisoners' revolt, it had been only a matter of time before some PEACE ship conveniently located on a hyperspace path to Bastille came here, hoping to convert the prisoners, to gain a foothold on the new world and claim it for their own. They must hope the Praesidentrix will not retaliate.

"Allow me to stop the piranhas," the Warden says. "This is not an attack."

"Summon Amu," she says. "But do not call off the defense." Theowane lowers her voice. "This could be as great a threat as anything the Praesidentrix might send."

She hunkers close to the screens and watches the lumbering PEACE ship against a background of stars. The deadly pinpoints of piranha interceptors hurtle toward it on a collision course.

The First Secretary enlarges the display on his terminal so he can read it better with his weakened eyesight. Across from him, the Praesidentrix sits ramrod straight in her chair.

She waits, a scowl chiseled into her face. The Praesidentrix looks as if she has aged a decade since the death of her consort, but still she insists on keeping her family matters and all details of her personal life private.

The way her policies have suddenly changed, though, tells the First Secretary how much she had loved the man.

The First Secretary avoids her cold gaze as he calls up his figures. "Here it is," he says. "I want you to know that your attempts to retake Bastille have already cost half of what we have invested in Bastille itself. On the diagram here"—he punches a section on the keypad—"you'll see that we have thirteen equivalent planets in the initial stages of terraforming, most of them under development by the penal service, two by private corporations. Several dozen more have gone beyond that stage and now have their first generation of colonists."

Overhead, the Praesidentrix chooses the skylight panels to project a sweeping ochre-colored sky from a desert planet. The vastness overwhelms the First Secretary. His skin is pale and soft from living under domes and inside prefabricated buildings all his life. He doesn't like outside; he prefers the cozy, sheltered environment of the catacombs and offices. He is a born bureaucrat.

"So?" the Praesidentrix asks.

The First Secretary flinches. "So is it worth continuing?" Especially, he thinks, *with more important things to worry about, such as raising the welfare dole, or gearing up for the next election six years from now.*

"Yes, it's worth continuing," she says without hesitating, then changes the subject. Her dark eyes stare up at the artificial desert sky. "Have you learned how one prisoner managed to take over the Warden system? The War-

den has a very shrewd Simulated Personality—how did they bypass him? I thought computer criminals were never assigned to self-sufficient penal colonies, for that reason."

The First Secretary shrugs, thinks about going through an entire chain of who was to blame for what, but then decides that this is not what the Praesidentrix wants. "That's the problem with computer criminals. Theowane was caught and convicted on charges of drug smuggling although all of her prior criminal activity seems to have involved computer espionage and embezzlement."

"Why was this not noticed? Aren't the records clear?"

"No," the First Secretary says, raising his voice a bit.

"She . . . altered them. We didn't know her background."

"Nobody checked?"

"Nobody could! We had to overhaul the main core to find out what had been changed, and to correct it from the cold backups." The First Secretary draws a deep breath to calm himself. "But I think you are following a false trail, Madame. Theowane only implemented the takeover on Bastille. Amu is the mind behind all this. He's the one who convinced the prisoners to revolt. He's the one who refuses to negotiate."

She turns, making sure she holds his gaze. "I have already set a plan in motion that will take care of him once and for all. And it will get Bastille back for us." The Praesidentrix leans back in her purple chair as it tries to conform to her body. Her gray-threaded hair spreads out behind her. *She was a beautiful woman once*, the First Secretary thinks. The rumors have not died about her dead consort, what he had done. . . .

The First Secretary makes a petulant scowl. "It's obvious you don't trust me with your plans, Madame. But will you at least explain to me why you are doing this? It goes beyond reason and financial responsibility." He purses his lips. "Is it because the prisoners are in the *ubermindist* loop? I find that hard to believe. It's just another illegal drug. Cutting off the supply will upset a few addicts—"

"More than that!"

"And cause some unrest," he continues, "as well as some reshuffling on the black market, but they'll adjust. Within a few years we'll have an equivalent drug from some other place, perhaps even a synthetic. Why is Bastille so important to you?"

The coldness in her gaze is worse than anything he could have imagined from her two months before.

"The *ubermindist* is only one reason," the Praesidentrix says. "The other is revenge."

I feel as if I am watching my own hand plunge a sword into the chest of a helpless victim. The piranha interceptors are part of me, controlled by my external systems—but I cannot stop them. Theowane has given the order.

I watch through the eyes of five interceptors as they home in for the kill, using their propellant to increase velocity toward impact. With their kinetic energy, they will destroy the vessel.

I receive alarm signals from the PEACE ship, but I ignore them, am forced to watch the target grow and grow as the first interceptor collides with a section amidships.

I see the hull plate, pitted with micrometeor scars, swell up, huge, and then wink out a fraction of a second before the interceptor crashes, rupturing the hull and exposing the inner environment to space.

Another interceptor smashes just below the bridge. I hear a transmitted outcry from the captain, begging us to stop the attack. Two more interceptors strike, one a glancing blow alongside the hull; the shrapnel tears open a wider gash. The PEACE ship continues its own destruction as air pressure bursts through the breaches in the hull, as moisture freezes and glass shatters. The fifth interceptor strikes the chemical fuel tanks, and the entire ship erupts in a tiny nova.

From the debris, a small target streaks away. I recognize it as a single escape pod. I detect one life form aboard. Of all the people on the ship . . . only one.

The escape pod descends, but then my own reflexes betray me as another interceptor also detects the pod, aligns its tracking, and streaks after it. Both enter the atmosphere of Bastille.

Now Amu arrives in the control center. I can tell from his expression he is upset. His head is shaved smooth, but his generous silvery beard, and eyebrows, and eyes give him a charismatic appearance. He is raising his voice to Theowane, but I cannot pay attention to their conversation.

The PEACE escape pod heats up, leaving an orange trail behind it as it burrows deeper into the atmosphere. It seems to have evasive capabilities.

The interceptor picks up speed, bearing down on the escape pod. But their velocities are so well matched that the piranha does no damage when it bumps its target.

A few moments later, the interceptor—with no shielding to protect it from a screaming entry into the atmosphere—breaks into flying chunks of molten slag.

Amu seems mollified when Theowane explains to him that the intruder was a PEACE ship. I know Amu wants nothing to do with religious fanatics; he has had enough of them in his past.

I pinpoint the splashdown target for the escape pod. Without waiting for an order, I dispatch one of the floating *ubermindist* harvesters across the oceans of Bastille. No matter how great a hold Theowane has over my Simulated Personality, she can do nothing against my life-preservation overrides, except when the security of the colony is at stake. She had forced me to consider the PEACE ship to be a threat, but in no way does an unarmed escape pod fall into the same category.

Ostensibly to allow it greater speed, but actually out of spite, I tell the harvester to dump its cargo of *ubermindist* before it churns off across the sea to reach the pod.

Amu stands in the holding bay of the cliffside tunnels. His bald head glistens in the glare of glowtablets recessed in the ceiling. His eyes flash.

A second rinse sprays the outside of the escape pod. Black streaks stain the hull from its burning descent, but the craft appears otherwise undamaged. After its dunking in the corrosive seas, Amu waits for purified water to purge the acidity.

Theowane follows him into the chamber. Amu listens to the last trickles of water coming out of the spray heads; drops run through a grate on the floor where the rinse water will be detoxified and reused.

During the hours it has taken the floating harvester to retrieve the escape pod, Amu has waited in silence with Theowane. He keeps his anger toward her in check.

Sensing his displeasure, she twice tries to divert his thoughts. Normally he would acquiesce just to please her. She has been his lover since before the revolt. But he doesn't like her making such important decisions on her own. It sets a bad example for the rest of the prisoners.

On the other hand, Amu knows that Theowane tried to keep Bastille free of the PEACE ships. And he approves.

Amu's parents had been involved in a violent, fanatical sect and had raised him under their repressive teachings, grooming him to be a propagator of the faith. He had absorbed their training, but eventually his own wishes had broken through. He fled, later to use those same charismatic and mob-focusing skills to whip up a workers' revolt on his home planet. If the revolt had succeeded, Amu would have been called a king, a savior. But instead Amu had ended up here, on Bastille.

He wants nothing more to do with religious fanatics. Now this one PEACE survivor presents him with an unpleasant problem.

Theowane runs her fingers over the access controls. "Ready," she says. She keeps her voice low and her eyes averted.

Amu stands to his full height in front of the escape pod. "Open it."

As the hatch cracks, a hiss of air floods in, equalizing the two pressures. Then comes a cough, then sputtering, annoying words. A young boy wrestles himself into a sitting position and snaps his arms out, flexing them and shaking his cramped hands. "What took you so long? You're as bad as PEACE."

Theowane steps back. Amu blinks, but remains in place. The boy is thin, with dark shadows around his eyes. His face appears bruised, his body shaken, his gaze wide with relief. "That was a hell of a ride!"

Amu can't stop himself from bursting out with a loud laugh. The boy whirls to him, outraged, but after a brief pause he too cracks a grin that contains immense relief and exhaustion. With this one response, he proves to Amu that he is no PEACE convert.

"Why didn't you let yourself out?" Theowane asks. "Isn't there an emergency release inside?"

The boy turns a look of scorn to her. "I know what's in the air on Bastille, and in the water. I couldn't see where I was. It might be bad to be cramped in this coffin for hours—but it would be plenty worse to take a shower in sulfuric acid." He pauses for just a moment. "And speaking of showers, can I get out of here and take one?"

After the boy has cleaned and rested himself, Amu summons him for dinner. The other prisoners on Bastille have expressed their curiosity, but they will have to wait until Amu decides to make a statement.

"Dy bathia," the boy says when Amu asks his name. "I

know it sounds noble and high-born. My parents had high expectations of me." He stops just long enough for Amu to absorb that, but not long enough for him to ask any further questions.

"I ran away from home," Dybathia says. "It took me a week to make it to the spaceport. When I got there, I slipped onto the first open ship and hid in their cargo bay. I didn't care where it was going, and I didn't plan to show myself until we were on our way into hyperspace. I figured any place was better than home, right?" He snickers.

"It turned out to be a PEACE ship. They wouldn't let me off. They kept me around, constantly quoting tracts at me, trying to make me convert. Do my eyes look glazed? Am I brain-damaged?"

Amu allows a smile to form, but he does not answer.

Dybathia says, "They shut off their servo-maintenance drones and made me do the cleaning, scrubbing down decks and walls with a solvent that should have been labeled as toxic waste. Look at my hands! The captain said monotonous work allows one to clear the mind and become at peace with the universe."

Theowane breaks into the conversation, "Why were you the only one who got to an escape pod?" Amu looks up at her sharply, but she doesn't withdraw the question.

Dybathia shrugs. "I was the only one who bothered. The rest of them just sat there and accepted their fate."

This rings so true with Amu, from his memories of his parents, that he finds himself nodding.

Dybathia looks at the mind-scanning apparatus; this will be the most dangerous moment for him. The device is left over from the first days of Bastille, when human supervisory crews had established the colony. That month had been the only time when non-prisoners and prisoners cohabited the planet; as a precaution they had used intensive search devices and mental scanners, which had remained unused since those other humans had turned Bastille over to the Warden.

"You do understand why we have to do this?" Amu asks.

Dybathia sees more concern on the face of the leader than he expects. This is going better than he had hoped. "I understand perfectly." He flicks his gaze toward Theowane, then back to Amu. "It's because she's paranoid."

Theowane bristles, as he expects her to. She makes each word of her answer clipped and hard. "Your story is too convenient. How do we know you're not an . . . assassin? What if you've been drugged or hypnotized? We can't know what the Praesidentrix might do."

Knowing it is imperative for him to allay their suspicions, Dybathia submits to an intensive physical search that scans every square centimeter of his body, probes all orifices, uses a sonogram to detect any subcutaneous needles, poison-gas capsules, perhaps a timed-release biological plague.

They find nothing, because there is nothing to find.

"The psyche assessor won't hurt you," Amu says. "Just stick your head within its receiving range."

"How does it work?" Dybathia asks. He frowns skeptically. "How do I know this isn't one of those machines

to condition prisoners? I don't want to end up like a PEACE convert."

"Explain it to him, Theowane," Amu smiles at her, as if he knows how it will rankle her.

Theowane blows air from her lips. "Everyone has a basic mental pattern, like a normal position that can never change. However, certain training—brainwashing, you'd call it—can superimpose another set of reactions on top of it. If you've been brainwashed or specially trained to do anything to Amu, or Bastille, it will show up here." She adjusts her apparatus.

Dybathia rolls his eyes. Amu smiles at that. Dybathia knows he is easing past the leader's defenses. "Let's just get this over with."

Without a word, the boy leans into the psyche assessor's range. Theowane makes no other comment as she works with the apparatus and takes her reading. She asks him a series of questions designed to break down mind-blanking techniques.

Dybathia answers them all without resisting.

Finally, Theowane shrugs. "It's clear," she says. "No one's been messing with his mind. He has no special training. He hasn't been brainwashed."

"I could have saved you trouble if you had just listened to me in the first place."

Amu claps a hand on the boy's shoulder. "I'll let you know when I've thought of a suitable way for Theowane to apologize."

When the survivor of the PEACE ship comes through with Theowane and Amu, I receive the unmistakable impression of tourist and tour guides. No, that is not quite correct . . . more like a visiting dignitary being shown points of interest.

Inside the forcewalls I watch them. True, I have a million different eyes around Bastille, optics to observe through, from monitoring cameras around the corridors, to the remote sensors of automatic digging machines. But my real eyes are here.

Purposely, I think, Amu ignores me as he brings the boy down the corridor. He points to the auxiliary control systems, explaining them with deceptive ease, making them sound simpler than they are. The three keep their backs pointedly turned and walk to the viewing window, outside of which the diggers continue their relentless excavations. The sky swirls with dark, oily colors over the hostile sea.

"It's going to be generations before anybody can bask under the Bastille sun, but at least it is now ours," Amu says, then lowers his voice. "And we aren't going to give it back when this world becomes habitable."

"Is it going to be worth the wait?" the boy asks, pushing his face close to the thick glass. I flick my concentration to one of the digger machines outside, looking through a different set of eyes, but the coarse optics and the glass distort the boy's face through the window.

Amu shrugs and rubs a hand on his silvery beard. "Theowane spends hours down here staring out the window. Actually, I think she just likes to taunt the Warden."

Finally, they turn toward me. I am too familiar with

Theowane's close-cropped reddish hair and her narrow, hard eyes. Amu carries much more capacity within him—an extraordinary person, with charisma and intelligence and compassion that allows him to do virtually anything he wants to. But he has chosen a path that society deems unacceptable.

The boy is the last to turn away from the sprawling view. He looks at me directly. I see him.

I know him.

He has counted on me recognizing him.

Instantly, I flash through a handful of buried newsclips, quick photographs shaded by the promise of anonymity, but it is enough. It augments my suspicions. I can remember few details of the person on whom I myself have been based, but some things are impossible to erase.

I . . . remember.

I wonder what he is up to. Why is he here, and what am I supposed to do about it?

The three visitors say no word to me as they continue their tour. I am left with the absolute conviction that the fate of Bastille, and perhaps the Praesidentrix's Federation depends upon me recognizing this boy, understanding what he wants, and acting accordingly.

I can no longer avoid the risk to myself. I must save my son.

Amu sits across from Dybathia for another meal. The boy fascinates him. He reminds Amu of himself as a young boy, or what Amu wanted to be—scrappy, irreverent, and intelligent.

Amu serves the two plates himself. Prisoners in the kitchen have prepared a tough, pancakelike dish from cultured algae and protein synthesizers. They are trying to develop a pseudo-steak, but they are several years from perfecting it. No matter. Amu is used to it and it is, after all, nutritious. What more can they ask for, with their limited supplies?

"It's tough. You might need to use your knife to cut it," he says. Dybathia frowns at the crude knife in his hand, but Amu continues. "It's easy to get mush from the hydroponics tunnels, but we keep striving for something with a firm texture. It's only been in the last month or two that we've been able to have something tough enough to cut."

Dybathia works at the food on his plate. "I was looking at the knife." The blunt instrument is barely serviceable.

Amu smiles; it is the "winning" smile he uses when making converts to his various causes. "A holdover from prison life."

"That was long ago," Dybathia says.

"Yes, and things have changed now."

Dybathia lifts an eyebrow.

"We're here alone, with no non-prisoners for us to worry about. Knives are no longer any threat. And the Warden is nicely contained. But we like to remember what we are and where we are. We manufacture these knives, and they serve the purpose." Amu lowers his voice. "Maybe if the meat gets a little more meatlike, we'll need better ones."

Amu looks across the table at Dybathia. The boy

seems fascinated with everything about Bastille, and Amu waits for him to ask the obvious question. But over several days it has not been forthcoming. Finally Amu breaks down and answers it anyway. "I grew up on New Kansas and left my parents, and their religious sect . . ." He burns inside, thinking of the PEACE converts.

Dybathia smiles. Amu dims the lights, bathing the room in a softer glow. It is storytime.

"New Kansas was a young planet, the soil somewhat unstable. We had planted grassland across entire continents. Wheat, alfalfa and prairie grass, with some used as rangeland for imported animals. But three-quarters of what we grew, the landholders exported offplanet. They were a handful of people who had financed the first colony ships and therefore claimed to own all of New Kansas. We were forbidden to leave our holdings.

"But I had learned how to whip my followers into a frenzy of religious devotion. We fought for our freedom. The colonists had come to New Kansas to start a fresh life. They felt that the Federation owed them at least a chance at autonomy. I knew how to galvanize them.

"They burned their fields. The fires swept across the plains for hundreds of kilometers, pouring smoke into the sky that you could see from landholding to landholding. The others rose up."

Amu speaks with a sense of wonder, paying little attention to the boy. "My people were ready to die for me. Can you imagine that? Holding people so much in the palm of your hand"—Amu extends his fist across the table, opening it so that Dybathia can see the calluses from his hard life—"they were ready to die for me. And we almost succeeded."

Amu lowers his eyes and pushes his plate away from him. "Almost."

"I've had enough," Dybathia says. He has eaten most of his pseudo-steak, but Amu stares at the wall, seeing in his memories the visions of burning grass and the bodies of his followers after the landholders had called in Federation reinforcements.

He doesn't notice as Dybathia stands and slips toward the door. "I'm going to sleep," the boy says. "I'll see you in the morning."

Amu nods and blinks his eyes. But they are filled with water and sting as if from smoke.

Theowane enters the control center alone. She moves with precise steps, as if stalking. She wants to know what is going on. She will catch the Warden. She will get the information together, and then she will take it to Amu.

The holographic Warden looks at her from his glass-walled cage. His expression remains dubious, fearful, with a layer of contempt. Theowane says nothing as she casually walks over to the panorama window. She gazes across the blasted ground. Though the diggers continue to re-form the landscape, she never sees any actual improvement.

Theowane stares for a few moments longer, then turns to meet the Warden's eyes. "You pride yourself so much on having human emotions and human reactions, Warden, but you're naive. You don't know how to hide

things from other people. I can read your reactions as clearly as if they were spelled out on a screen."

The Warden blinks at her. "I do not understand."

"I caught you yesterday."

He extends his hands forward until the image fuzzes near the edge of the forcewalls. "What do you mean?"

"The boy," Theowane says. "You recognized him. It was painfully obvious. You know who he is. You know why he's here—and it isn't because of that crazy story he told us. Explain it to me now."

The Warden hesitates a moment, then hardens his face into a stoic mask. "I don't know what you are talking about."

Theowane raises her eyebrows. She reaches out and caresses the control panel. "I can turn the worm loose and delete you." That doesn't seem to frighten the Warden; she has used the same threat too many times before.

"Then you will lose whatever information you imagine I have."

"Perhaps I can find some way to make you feel pain," she says.

The Warden shrugs. "I am not afraid anymore."

In all her taunting, Theowane has taught the Warden as much about herself as she has learned from him. He knows exactly how to infuriate her.

"I'll inform Amu," she says, trying to regain her composure. "That will stifle whatever plans you are hatching."

Theowane straightens away from the window and sees the Warden turn his head, flicking his glance to look outside. Sensing something, hearing a muffled sound too close, she whirls around—

The giant automatic digger rears up and plunges through the glass. With its great scooping and digging gears churning, it claws out the poured stone and insulation, ripping girders and breaching the wall.

Theowane stumbles back, sucking in a breath to scream as the deadly, acid-drenched air of Bastille rushes inside.

"You're quiet today," Amu says as he leads the boy down into one of the lower levels. Smells of oil, dirt, and stale air fill the tunnels.

"Introspective," Dybathia corrects. He thinks that word will better disarm Amu. He has not thought his silence and uneasiness would be so noticeable, but then he remembers that Amu is a master at studying other people.

"Ah, introspective, is it?" Amu's lips curl in amusement.

"I have been through a lot in the last few days."

Amu accepts this and continues leading him down to where the corridors widen into larger chambers hewn from the rock. Amu spends hours showing him distillation ponds that remove the alkaloid poisons from the seawater. Like a proud father, Amu demonstrates the rows of plants growing under garish artificial sunlight, piped in and intensified through optical-fiber arrays stretching through the rock to surface collectors.

Other prisoners work at their tasks and seem to move more quickly when Amu watches them. Dybathia wonders how they can consider this to be so different from working under another kind of master.

Amu continues to talk about his grand vision, how they have made their colony self-sufficient. It has been difficult at first without supply ships from the Federation, but they have overcome those obstacles and now have everything they did before—except their prison.

Then Amu speaks in a dreamier voice, explaining about the terraforming activities, how he has switched the diggers to mining materials useful for their own survival, rather than supplying *ubermindist* offplanet. The floater harvesters are spreading algae and Earth plankton that have been tailored to Bastille's environment. They are resculpting the atmosphere of the planet, making it a place where humans will one day be able to walk outside and in peace. Amu's long-term goals and his naive sense of wonder disgust Dybathia, but he keeps his feelings hidden. The boy will know when the time has come.

Amu says something he thinks is funny. Dybathia isn't paying attention, but automatically snorts in response.

Amu nods, approvingly.

When alarm klaxons belch out and echo in the tunnel, the noise startles Dybathia, even though he has been expecting it.

My life-preservation overrides force me to close the airlock on the other end of the corridor to keep Bastille air from penetrating farther into the complex. I do not resist the impulse. I know it will trap Theowane inside.

She sprawls on the floor, trying to crawl forward. The floor is smooth and slippery, and she cannot get enough purchase to move herself. Her eyes are wide with horror. Her lips turn brown, then purplish as she gasps, and the sulfuric acid eats out her lungs. I force myself to watch, for all the times she has watched me.

The digging machine, sensing that it has been led astray, stops clawing and churning, then uses its scanners to reorient itself. The big vehicle clanks and drops clods of dirt and shattered rock as it backs outside.

Theowane croaks words. "Open—open door!"

"Sorry, Theowane. That would endanger the colony."

Before, I was afraid of the worm, which forbade me to do anything against Theowane and the other prisoners. But the worm, though deadly, is not intuitive and is unable to extrapolate the consequences of my actions. I will take the risk, for my son. I can do much damage, while doing nothing overt.

I have used an old sensor-loop taken from the archives of the digging machines' daily logs. Broadcasting this sensor-loop along with an override signal to one nearby digger, I made the machine think it saw a different landscape, where the route of choice led it directly through the viewing window.

The chamber has filled with Bastille's air, and I begin to see static discharges as the corrosive atmosphere eats into the microchips, the layers that form the computer's brain, my Simulated Personality—and the worm.

But the auxiliary computer core lies deep and unreachable below the lower levels. Bastille's acid atmosphere will destroy the main system here, where the worm has been added, but within a fraction of a second my own

backup in the auxiliary computer will kick in. I should lose consciousness for only an instant before I am re-created.

My only wonder is whether the other Me will be me after all, or only a Simulated Personality that thinks it is.

Theowane lies dead but twitching on the floor, sprawled out in front of me. Blotches cover her skin. It is difficult for me to see anything now, with the images growing distorted and fuzzy, breaking up. I feel no pain, only a sense of displacement.

In the last moment, even the forcewalls seem to be gone. I have conquered the worm.

Dybathia watches Amu closely as the alarms sound. The leader stiffens and looks around. The other prisoners run to stations. Amu claps his hands and bellows orders at them. His face looks concerned: he doesn't understand what is happening.

Dybathia gives him no time to understand.

Amu bends down to him. "We've got to get you to a safe place. I don't know what's going on—"

In that moment, Dybathia brings up the prison knife taken from Amu's table, pushing all the wiry strength of his body behind it. He drives the dull point under Amu's chin, tilting it sideways, and slashes across his throat. He has only one chance. He has no special training. Only his heritage.

Blood sprays out. Amu grunts, falling to his knees and backward. Scarlet spatters the silver of his beard, and the whites of his eyes grow red from burst capillaries. He reaches out with a hand, but Dybathia dances back, holding the dripping knife in his hand.

Amu's expression is complete shock shadowed with pain and confusion. He tries to talk, but only gurgles come out.

Dybathia snarls and hisses. "How? Is that what you're trying to say? *How?* Are you amazed because your psyche assessor detected no brainwashing? You forgot to consider that maybe I wasn't brainwashed, that maybe I *wanted* to do this because I hate you so much. I am free to act. I have no special training."

The light fades behind Amu's eyes, but the confusion seems as great. Dybathia continues. "My father was a great man, an important man—a fleet commander. He became an *ubermindist* addict, and that was a great secret. Does that mean I am not supposed to love him? That I wasn't supposed to try to help him? Do you know what happens when an *ubermindist* addict is cut off from his supply?"

Dybathia kneels beside the dying man to make sure his words come clear. "The withdrawal fried my father's nerves. He lost all muscle control. He went into a constant seizure for eight days—his mind took that long to burn out. He went blind from the hemorrhages. His body was snapped and broken by his own convulsions. You caused that, Amu. You did that to him, and now I did this to you. My choice. My revenge."

But Amu is already dead. Dybathia does not know how much he understood at the last. The only sound Dybathia hears is his own breathing, a monotonous

wheeze that fills his ears. The boy stands without moving as several other prisoners shout and come running toward him.

Inside her office, the Praesidentrix has chosen a honey-colored sky with a brilliant white sun. She finds it soothing. For the first time in ages, she feels like smiling.

The First Secretary stands at the doorway, interrupting her reverie. "You asked to see me, Madame?"

She turns to him. For a moment he wears a fearful expression, as if he thinks she has caught him at something. She nods to make him feel at ease. "I've just received word from the Warden on Bastille. We have two Dreadnoughts in orbit and all prisoners are now subdued. Amu and Theowane are both dead."

The First Secretary takes a step backward in astonishment. He looks for someplace to sit down, but the Praesidentrix has no other chairs in her office. "But how?" He raises his voice. "How!"

"I placed an operative on Bastille. A . . . young man."

"An operative? But I thought Amu had equipment to detect any training alterations."

The Praesidentrix pulls her lips tight. "The young man's father died from *ubermindist* withdrawal after the prison takeover. I believed the young man had sufficient motivation to kill Amu. He was free to act."

The First Secretary sputters and keeps looking for a place to sit. "But how did you know? What did you do?"

"He acted as a catalyst to spur the Warden into taking a more drastic action than he was likely to take on his own, with nothing else at stake. Because we built the Warden's Artificial Personality, I knew how he would react to certain pressures." She waves a hand, anxious to get rid of the First Secretary so she can use the radio again. "I just thought you'd like to know. You're dismissed."

He stumbles backward, unable to find words. He stops and turns back to the Praesidentrix, but she closes the door on him. The subspace projection chimes, announcing an incoming transmission. She sighs with a pride and contentedness she has not felt in quite some time. He has called her even before she could contact him.

The Warden's image appears in front of her like a painful memory. It is as she remembers her consort when he was a dashing and brave commander, streaking through hyperspace nodes and knitting the Federation together with his strength.

The Warden is only a simulation, though, intangible and far away. But that would not be much different from their original romance, with her consort flitting off through the Galaxy for three-quarters of the year while she held the reins of government at home. She had rarely held his body anyway; but they had spoken often through the private subspace link.

They greet each other in the same breath and then the widowed Praesidentrix begins catching up on everything she has wanted to say to him, repeating all the things she did tell him while he writhed in delirium from his withdrawal, while she had concocted a false story about his fatal "accident" in order to avert a scandal.

But first she must say how proud she is of their son. ♦

Home Is Where The Heart Is

Dan Stedronsky

Dorothy floated end over end through a corridor of reverberating sound and coalescing color, and came awake. Her eyes opened, focused, and were immediately greeted by the kindly face of her Auntie Em as she hovered above her applying a cold compress to her brow. There were other faces too, gathered around her, and she saw that they were the familiar faces of her family gazing down at her with concern in their eyes. And she realized suddenly that she was lying in bed, *her* bed, in her room, in her little house in Kansas! She was *home*!

She smiled sleepily, and the smile multiplied on the gentle faces turned down toward her, and the fear and apprehension vanished from the loving eyes. Then she tried to speak, but



Illustration by David Detrick

they told her to hush: She'd taken a nasty bump on the head, and had all of them worried for a while there; but they were all so happy to see her awake and all right; and now she should save her strength and try to get some rest. But she was so excited and tried to tell them of the wonderful place she'd been to, and the people she'd met, they'd *all* been there! But they only smiled and laughed and said, "My land!" and "What an imagination!" and put it down to the blow she had received. But that was okay . . . because she was *home*, and oh it was *good*, so *good* to be home.

There's no place like home.

Unfortunately, the recent tornado had *not* dropped a house on mean old Miss Elvira Gulch down the road, not in this dimension anyway; in fact, it had not even managed to drop a tractor tire or decent-sized rock on her. She had been down in her cellar tinkering with her ham radio outfit when it hit. She'd stayed down there until the storm passed; it hadn't even affected her reception too badly.

And so, two days later, the sheriff came and took Toto away and had him gassed.

That was when Dorothy began to have doubts.

Everyone said they were sorry about Toto, they agreed that it was cruel and unfair and that Miss Gulch was surely a *terrible* person of the worst sort . . . but they all concluded their consolations with the same self-assured recitation of the homespun wisdom that *That Is The Way Things Are and You Can't Fight City Hall*.

Auntie Em said, "It couldn't be helped."

Hickory said, "Sometimes that's just the way things go, honey."

Hunk said, "What's done is done."

Zeke said, "Ya gotta break a few eggs to make a omelet"—but then again, Zeke was never very clever with words.

They all sat and watched it happen, and they didn't do a thing to stop it.

Uncle Henry tried to console her further by saying that she could have any chicken she wanted for a pet. But she didn't want a chicken. She wanted Toto.

Four days passed, days spent in a flurry of activity as the remnants of the farm were picked up and put to order. There was much to do. The barn had been left undamaged, mostly; but the house was now half a house. The kitchen, living room and Dorothy's bedroom had remained intact; but Auntie Em and Uncle Henry's room, along with the small dining room and pantry, had been sucked up whole by the tornado to be dropped piecemeal across the flat terrain. Bits of plaster and wood, broken furniture, foodstuffs and other oddments, mostly useless now, littered the green landscape. A profusion of roofing shingles lay in abandonment about the grounds like scattered playing cards, evidence of a less than friendly game of poker. The henhouse tilted crazily at an angle, the wooden legs on one side of the raised platform shattered by the impact of what had been a small barrel, now a pile of splintered staves and rusted iron binding rings.

Dorothy did not share in the work. For the first three days she remained in bed on doctor's orders and watched from her window when she was not catching a few hours of fitful sleep. It seemed the tornado had hit their farm worse than most, and many of their nearby neighbors came out to lend a hand with the cleanup and rebuilding. In this new whirlwind of activity that ensued, the days were full of the smells of dust, sweat and lumber, and the sounds of hammer blows, shouted questions and directives and not a few arguments as to how best a particular problem might be approached.

At night many of the men camped out near the house and she could hear them planning the next day's work, swapping stories and off-color jokes and commenting on how lucky they all were to get through the storm with their lives. One played the harmonica mournfully, and the tears flowed freely from Dorothy's eyes as she listened.

On the fourth day she was allowed to get up and around, and thought she might pitch in and help with the work, but Auntie Em insisted she should take it easy and encouraged her to go for a walk and take some air. She found the light breeze refreshing, and hung around a while to watch Zeke and two others use long-handled hooks to coax a broken carriage wheel from the precarious embrace of a high tree limb; then she disappeared for several hours. Near sunset, when they were beginning to worry about her, she returned, visibly sullen and depressed, and ate just enough to satisfy Auntie Em's gentle insistences before going straight to bed.

On the morning of the fifth day Dorothy rose late and was mooning around the farm distractedly when she saw a car moving up the old road toward her, trailing a dusty exhaust cloud behind it. She hid behind a bale of straw and watched it pull in. A man trundled his large frame out of the car and stood uncertainly in the summer heat. It was the sheriff, and he looked hot and uncomfortable. He produced a sodden handkerchief from his breast pocket and dabbed at his forehead in annoyance. Jeez, he hated having to disturb these good people twice in one week, especially considering his last sorry duty here . . . but *A Duty Is A Duty*, he told himself, just as he'd told Dorothy on that dark afternoon; it was His Job, *Somebody Had To Do It, He Was Only Following Orders!* He stepped up into the cool shade of the porch, wiping irritably at his tiny grey moustache. Auntie Em left her work at the sink and met him at the door, ushering him in and drying her hands on her rough brown apron.

The sheriff had never been particularly well known for any talent in the art of illusion, but now he stood in the small kitchen with his hat in his pudgy hands, looking simultaneously very large and very small. Auntie Em offered him a chair but he said that he'd rather not sit, that his visit was an official one. She frowned at him, puzzled.

"Em, I'm awful sorry to bother you like this, you know how bad I feel about the other day and all, and . . ." He stopped, searched, spoke. "It's about Dorothy," he said, dropping his eyes and directing the statement at the

weathered old rug on which he stood. The rug, wide, lifeless, dull and often beaten, stared back at him. The two of them could have been brothers. "Is she around?"

Auntie Em looked worried. "What is it, Ed? Has she done something wrong? What—"

"Is she around, Em?" he repeated.

"She's out millin' around somewhere, I imagine. She's been awful depressed lately—but it ain't your fault, Ed, and she knows that down deep inside. She'll get over it. Now what's this all about?"

"Well, Em, I just come from Miss Gulch's place, and she's sayin' . . . Well, I don't know how to put this . . . she says . . . she claims that Dorothy attacked her!"

"What?"

"Those are her words, not mine. She said that Dorothy jumped her and . . . and threw a bucket o' water on her."

"Wha? . . . No! Dorothy would *never* do a thing like that! *Never!*" Auntie Em wrung her thin-veined hands in frustrated anger; she seemed near to tears. "I don't know what that woman is up to . . . Hasn't she done enough already?"

"Well I don't know, Em, let's just hold up a bit and think this thing through. I don't see how Miss Gulch would have any reason to lie about a thing like this. I just saw her, and she was pretty steamed up! So don't you go gettin' riled up too, Em. I know Dorothy's a sweet kid who wouldn't hurt a fly . . . but I was just thinkin', y' know, maybe that bump she took on the noggin—"

But he didn't get to finish because just then Dorothy, who had been listening to this exchange through the open side window, came bursting through the door and with a loud hoot drenched the sheriff with a bucket of well water. She stood back, eyes riveted intently on him, waiting.

But again, it didn't work.

It took her quite a while to realize that the only way they were going to let her out of bed was if she shut up and quit ranting about stopping The Evil Ones. It was very strange; everyone thought *she* was crazy. Auntie Em doted on her like a worried hen, serving her soup in bed, palming her forehead for fever, rushing around muttering, "Poor dear! Poor, poor child!" Then the Doc came from town and took her temperature and listened to her heartbeat and asked her questions and made her say ahhh; and then he told her that she was very sick and would have to get lots of rest, but soon she would be shipshape and better than ever. And he packed up his black bag and smiled, and winked at her, and told her again that everything would be fine, just fine.

And in the hall she heard him whispering to Auntie Em and Uncle Henry, and he said "severe trauma" and "watch her closely"; and she knew then that she would have to be very careful about what she said and did in front of them.

Now she could see how it was.

It was different here. She had met evil before, in the other place, had learned that it must be fought. But

here, The Evil Ones were not so easily beaten. In fact, for all she knew, they might well be indestructible!

She had to consider this possibility in view of the fact that everyone seemed so afraid of this witch, too afraid to lift even a finger against her! Perhaps they'd tried in the past to destroy her, to break the supernatural hold she had on them, and had found it impossible. But no, that explanation didn't ring true. It was only chance that had enabled her to destroy that other witch and free the kingdom of Oz from her reign of terror. Chance, and courage. The people of Oz, though they feared the witch, still desired her destruction. Here, everyone was so unbelievably cowed that they actually *bindered* her in her attempts!

Yes, it was courage and strength and conviction that had found the means to end the witch's reign. But these people; here, they had defeated themselves! They had knowledge of right and wrong, and power, and free will—and yet they had chosen to become complacent servants to the witch's cruel whims. They were not evil themselves . . . but they *accepted* the evil, they *tolerated* it—and that seemed somehow *worse* to her.

When they'd taken Toto away, and she had cried and cried and, sobbing, asked *Why?* they all said that she would understand someday, and they used the word *responsibility*, which didn't make any sense—it was all backwards! She felt sorry for them.

And distant from them as well.

So she began to act "cured." When Uncle Henry came in to see her the next morning, she smiled pleasantly and remarked that the day certainly looked as if it was going to be a beautiful one. She decided to go slowly, so her recovery would not appear *too* miraculous. She would pretend to lapse into a sullen silence for a while, then be all the more cheerful the next time someone came to visit. The Doc came to see her several times and often asked her questions about Oz and its people; so she began to pretend that the memories of the place were fading from her mind like those of a dream. And when she felt the time was right she burst into tears before Auntie Em, telling her that she knew she was being kept bedridden for something she'd done, something very bad, but she couldn't remember what it had been; and she thought she needed to apologize to someone for whatever it was, but she just couldn't remember and she wished they would forgive her anyway, oh why was she so confused? And she slept most of that day, and in the evening she came out and told them that she felt better now, and wanted to apologize to the sheriff—but they all smiled and laughed and hugged her and said that it was okay, that everyone understood.

And it worked. She was again given free run of the farm—but she could feel their eyes on her, watching her.

It was midsummer, no school for another month and a half; and so she played the role of carefree child to the hilt, running and skipping and occasionally breaking into song, as was her habit. But while she was feeding the chickens or running to get the mail or helping Auntie Em in the kitchen (she didn't fetch water anymore; everyone seemed quite happy to get their own water now),

while she was doing all these things or just lying lazily in the tall grass she dreamed of a myriad of diverse and colorful ways to *get* the monster that was Miss Gulch.

Perhaps a silver bullet, or a stake of holly through the heart . . . more likely it was something no one would guess: A certain set of musical notes repeated in a certain sequence, or a particular combination of words spoken just so at dusk while facing north. Perhaps the witch could be separated from the source of her power; perhaps it lay within some piece of jewelry she wore, blazing in the stone of a ring, humming in the metal of a bracelet. The power might lie in her false teeth; if one could sneak into her house at night while she slept, to steal them away in the night-table glass, quietly, quietly . . . but then, just as you reached for them, the grisly grinning things might cry out, "Awake! Awake! A thief in the house!"

But no matter what she thought or planned, her mind always returned to the helplessness of trying to do it all *alone*. If only everyone weren't so intent on *preserving* the evil in their world! If only one other person would instead *join* her in her quest!

Judy Lin had come over the other day. They had gone walking down to the pond near Campbell's farm, to dip their feet and sit on the grassy slope breathing the insect-riddled air. Judy Lin was Dorothy's best friend . . . and when she heard what had happened to Toto she burst into tears, and that made Dorothy cry too, and they held each other and shook like two small wind-blown flowers on the pond's edge. Finally Dorothy said, "I hope she dies!" and Judy Lin agreed, and so Dorothy tried, "She's so mean, I'd like to kill her!" and Judy Lin bobbed her head in affirmation, so Dorothy held her gaze steadily and said, "Why don't we?"—and Judy Lin looked up with horror in her wet eyes and said, "Oh, no, Dorothy! That's not for us to say! That's for God!"—and Dorothy laughed and said that she was just kidding and that she knew; and then she began to cry again and Judy Lin held her and cried some more too . . . and never guessed that Dorothy was crying not for Toto but for *her*, her best friend, because now she could see that the silent communication of the fear was complete.

God helps those who help themselves, she thought. Poor dear Judy Lin, The Evil Ones even turn God to their advantage, and now they have *you* too.

And she cried for herself as well, because she felt so terribly, terribly alone.

So many things were beginning to make sense, things she had never understood before. The reason for the senseless cruelty and hostility some of her classmates

held toward one another. Why adults would sometimes argue heatedly over trifles and lose their tempers, or drink beer and whisky until they became ill or unpleasant. Dorothy decided that to *tolerate* evil was to *welcome* it. And having accepted it, people became blind to how it twisted and crippled them. Slowly. Stealthily.

Hideously.

She found a frog in the small pond near the northwest border of the farm. She named him Toto Two, and carried him everywhere, but it was not the same.

She sat at her window, her hands laid flat on the sill, her chin resting in the cradle of fingers, staring out into the metronomically chirping night. Stars crowded the sky, looked down upon the land with peaceful indifference.

Out there, beyond the expanses of wheat waving weakly in the thin breeze, was the witch's domain. She almost imagined she could see its dim outline against the grey night backdrop, squatting small and insignificant, not magical at all, the antithesis of magic. And beyond, far beyond the sea of wheat, out past the rim of her tiny world, how many more like her?

How many Evil Ones? And how many more whom the disease had touched, how many who turned their faces, shut their eyes, gave silent thanks for the passing of the shadow and never a thought to its dread final destination? Perhaps millions. Perhaps . . .

She sat pondering all this, and the reflection of the crescent moon slowly made its arc across her cloudless eyes.

It was just before dawn, and she went out quietly and crept up the ladder to the high loft of the barn and opened the large bay door, and looked out across the endless flat terrain dotted with farms and silos, and watched it shift colors as the sun rose to illuminate the day. And she thought: *This* world does not have emerald cities or poppy fields or enchanted forests or yellow brick roads . . . but it is not the lack of *these* things that diminishes its beauty.

She wished that water *would* melt the evil and unhappiness in this world. And she wished for rain.

But she knew that was not how things worked, not here in the *real* world.

She ran a finger over the place where the bump had been. It was still tender. She would have to hit just right.

And lastly, she thought, "There *is* no place like home." And then, to Toto Two, tucked away in the pocket of her skirt, she whispered, "Ready, Toto? We're going *home*!" And she jumped.

Home is where the heart is. ♦

Oh the Blackness Will Make You Dance

Warren Brown

"Are you sure you want to do it, Kenny?" Sally Dale asked him, her slim hands moving over the program board jacked into the *Lady-L's* brain. "It seems a little morbid."

"Just a little, Tex," Kenyon laughed, grinning at the cyber-tech. Enough time had passed since Lisa had died for him to have put the pain away. He kept it down inside himself, letting it escape in unexpected tears inside his quiet ship as it ran through the mysterious spaces between the stars.

Sally continued working over the program, her big southern face pretty beneath its pile of sand-blond curls. Her blue eyes were set too



Illustration by Tom Miller and Ron Miller

close together for conventional beauty, but her intelligence and humor lent her a fresh attractiveness hard for men to resist. Kenyon hadn't tried.

"I suppose I ought to be jealous," she said, entering the last of Lisa's mindprint into the *Lady-L*'s brain, her deft fingers working then to disconnect the patches.

"Are you?" Kenyon asked.

"Nope," she replied, hands on his shoulders, eyes gazing unblinkingly into his. "As long as you're not when you're out on your runs."

"Fair's fair," he smiled, kissing her quickly. "We've got a good thing going for ourselves."

"Then let's go make something of it," she said. "You two will have plenty of time together out in the black." She slipped her arm under his and pulled playfully, thinking suddenly what little good such a strong, solid arm was up against the tricks the black could play on you.

Sally watched Kenyon sleep, listened to the noises he made. Muffled cries of past frights and emergencies out in the cold places between the stars, she thought. Or maybe he saw the image of Lisa in his dreams, close to him, then slipping away. Sally never told him he cried out in his sleep. When it was bad, he woke himself with his own sounds, frowning sleepily at her while she held him.

She never asked him what it was about, though—and she often wondered why not. She loved Kenyon, loved him and knew it made her life more difficult than it ought to be. It pained her to see the *Lady-L* rise up from Earth in the spectral glow of her drives, pained her to know the ship took Kenyon out into time and stars and the unknown, away from her. It was his coming back that made any of it worthwhile. When he was in port, he was hers.

And now, thanks to her technical skill, the *Lady-L* would carry her namesake, Kenyon's copilot, wife, and lover out with him on every trip to the stars. And she, Sally Dale, would wait on Earth for his return, Kenyon with his beloved ghost. She slipped from the bed, walked quietly through the dark apartment and out to the terrace. The sun was just showing on the horizon beyond the spaceport. The gantries reached up, dark ladders to the sky. Beneath them lay *Lady-L* the ship, and Lisa the woman, sleeping in silicon, mind copy of the real.

Sally Dale was still watching the sunrise when Kenyon came onto the terrace.

"Sleep well?" he asked, touching her hair gently.

She felt his touch, sensed the quiet strength of his hand, thought again how futile it was when space was ready to take you.

"As well as ever," she replied, and held him.

Kenyon felt himself mouthing the words to the old space crew song, silent words in a silent ship.

Oh the blackness will make you dance,

the speed will make you sing.

The stars are lamps upon the stage,

the night's a curtain for plays so strange . . .

He'd forgotten most of the words—didn't know, in fact, why he'd dredged up the ones he'd suddenly mumbled. He'd been in space a long time. Out in the blackness between solar systems it was easy to go to the odd. It was the rare man who could handle the deep, long runs, when all that surrounded you was a too-thin hull, a speck of a speck of a speck, with no company other than stray atoms of hydrogen and whatever other small bits of matter had found their way out between the lights.

Between the lights, he thought. Where did he pick that up? Space was full of nothing if not slang—the banter of the pilots at planetfall, something to keep them above the groundhuggers. Kenyon smiled to himself—wondering if planet dwellers knew the spacers called them that. It was only fair. After all, what were Kenyon and his kind called? Star hoppers, ship hermits, black dreamers, space crazies. New names on every planetfall. Spacers were looked upon with mixtures of emotion—admiration, jealousy, fear.

"What did you say?" Lisa asked from behind him. She had entered the control room quietly, slipped now into the seat beside his.

"Just thinking, babe." Kenyon moved his right hand over to touch hers.

"Of what?" she squeezed his fingers.

"Old songs. Songs they used to sing when the ships had big crews—when they used to sing against the fear of going crazy."

She nodded. "It never gets any smaller out here, does it?"

"Not much," he replied, his eye suddenly caught by a silent amber flickering on the board. He pointed at it.

"You think that port damper's going to give us trouble?"

She frowned, punched a code series into the keypad on her chair arm, watched the answering readout on the control board. "No," she said, her voice sure. "But it'll need to be caught before we lift again."

"You're the doctor," Kenyon said, smiling at her, hardly believing that the pretty woman with her curly dark hair and blue eyes bright with intelligence was dead. She'd been the love of his life, that woman. They'd been light-years upon light-years in travel out on the spaceways, pilots, lovers—a team well known on a dozen planets—even back when the crews were big.

But space will get you when you're not looking, the old saying went. And there had come that day he'd risen from the sleep tank, waited for her, cold and stiff, ready to towel the chemicals from her back, and for her to towel them from his. But she didn't rise from her durite coffin. She just lay inside it, features peaceful, her life monitors flat green lines.

Kenyon remembered hauling the half-conscious medic out of his tank, groggy on the speed-wake he'd shot him up with. Lord, he thought, it was when we used to carry medics. Could it be that long ago?

The medic had done what he could—which was nothing. She'd died somewhere in sleep, maybe in the middle of some dream. A good deal of Kenyon had died with her.

So now he rode with her memory, a hologrammic ghost projected from the ship's brain, a gift from Sally Dale. The days of big crews were gone. The days of mom-and-pop crews were gone. Hell, Kenyon thought, they'll want to put the whole damn *Lady-L* on robot tripping next thing I know.

The amber light on the board had long since gone red. Kenyon stared at it, frowning. As tenuous a thing as a magnetic damper had been all there was between him and the searing radiation of the *Lady-L*'s power core for years. Yet it had always functioned. And if it had not, then the backups had. But he was on those now, and they were failing. Not unheard of, but really against the good odds.

Kenyon didn't want to die. He wanted to go on riding out to the stars in the *Lady-L*, and with Lisa. He wanted to see Earth again and Sally Dale. He thought of her as they decelerated into the Solar System, balancing strain on the dampers against the chance of too high a velocity, a bungled approach to Earth. It was a funny kind of game this crippled homecoming, so delicate, so much to lose.

"You're concentrating too hard. We'll make it, love." Lisa spoke from beside him. It was good to have her there, ghost or not.

"I was just thinking about my girl in port," Kenyon said, forcing a smile, then finding it loosen into a real one. In a moment he found himself laughing. It felt good.

"She must be something," Lisa said, smiling back, her hand giving the now-familiar touch.

Kenyon couldn't remember when he'd actually started feeling her fingers, those delicate, hologrammic illusions. He remembered the surprise more than the occasion. He'd thought he was going crazy, had even thought of shutting off the ship brain functions that created Lisa's ghost. But he was a flexible man. And after a while he simply reasoned it was some sort of mental compensation for the strong visual and auditory reality of Lisa's memory projection. Why shouldn't his mind add the tactile sense? Out in the silence, what did it matter? He accepted it as something good.

"We'll make it, love," Lisa's voice said next to him. "We're almost home."

"Almost," Kenyon replied. "Almost."

Sally Dale waited with the emergency crew as the white speck of the *Lady-L* grew larger above them, her drives a green glow against the high overcast. She thought as she watched of all the years she'd waited on the same field, for the same ship. People had come and gone at the spaceport, married, transferred out, retired. Yet here she was, a chief technician now, a big crew under her—but still out to meet the *Lady-L* when she came. Her man, his ship, their every return and departure the mark of years passing. Odd homecomings, odd goings away.

"How come the old lady's on field? It's not as if she's hands-on crew anymore."

She caught Benson's words behind her. The girl was

a new subordinate to Kelly, one of the radiation men. She was helping him armor up, holding his helmet, ready to fasten it on as final shield against exposure to what might have gotten past the *Lady-L*'s bad damper.

Sally frowned as she heard it, continuing to watch the descent of the Lisa. There was no malice in the comment. Senior personnel were old men or old ladies. It wasn't without affection.

"She's got a connection with that ship, Benson," Kelly snapped. "You're new, so you ought to know we all think she's all right," he added.

"Sorry," the young woman replied, adding, "No offense meant," in a voice designed to make peace.

Sally let herself smile. Her veteran crew were good people. Benson too, no doubt. She admitted to herself that it was indeed odd that she stood the field, considering her rank. She had several crews to coordinate. But it was an emergency, after all. And it was Kenyon's ship. She touched her throat mike and called the tower.

"Dale here. What's the story from *Lady-L*?"

"No change in status, ma'am. She's on standard approach with all critical landing systems functioning normally. We confirm hard-R in the control room."

"Acknowledged," she said. "We're suited here. Advise any change in status."

"Will do. Tower out."

She turned and motioned the new tech over. "You're Benson, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Glad to have you with us, Benson." She offered her hand, felt the cold dampness of Benson's palm. "Your first emergency?"

The girl nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

"Well, don't worry too much. If she wasn't safe for planetfall, they would have taken her up at orbit station. Do me a favor and help me armor up. The old lady needs to do some hands-on field duty from time to time—right?"

"Yes ma'am." Benson flushed. "I'm sorry . . ."

Sally smiled. "Don't be. Hard time for the new person. Let's get me fastened in."

Sally stood alone in the control room of the *Lady-L*. She had sent her crew away after they had set up decon procedures. The failed damper had left the control room bathed in radiation, but none of the flight recorders or controls had been seriously damaged. The decon generator droned away behind her. In a few days the control room would be safe for unarmored ground crew.

"Well, we made it down again," Kenyon said from his control chair, his voice echoing through the speaker of his own radiation armor, his worn face smiling through the durite face shield.

"You always said the luck ran with you, Kenny," Sally replied, feeling awkward in her armor, its bulkiness and weight making her feel suddenly old.

"So far, Tex. You know . . ." he began, then hesitated. "... I thought a lot about you on the way in, when we didn't know whether or not the radiation would be too much for the armor. I didn't want to die and not see

you again." He said it in a matter-of-fact voice, that straightforward way of his that never asked for a reply.

What he said moved her as nothing else he'd ever said. Yet he had used that "we." *We didn't know.* Lisa was always with him. She, Sally, had seen to that. Years ago, she thought. Years ago. But this was port. Thinking of nothing but his words, the closest he'd ever come to a declaration of love, she reached out a green-armored hand.

"C'mon, Kenny. The *Lady-L* will have to stay in port for a while. We'll have some time together."

He reached for her hand just as she pulled it back, remembering. He stood up, somehow graceful in the cumbersome armor. She looked into his bright eyes, feeling her own well up with tears. "Just a second, Kenny. I've got to pull a module from the ship brain."

"Hey, it can wait," he said, suddenly stepping toward her, sweeping green shielded arms around her. She had already started to move toward the service panel, and in moving passed through his grasp, as if through mist. He stared at her for a moment, then at his arms, which held nothing.

She saw by his face that he knew what she had done.

"Why?" he said quietly. "Why?"

"Oh, Kenny," she said, her hand poised over one of the *Lady-L*'s memory modules. "Because I couldn't bear never seeing you again. Because I felt the same about you as you felt about Lisa."

"How long?" he asked, his voice weak.

"Does it matter?" She shook her head. "A long time, Kenny. Your luck ran out a long time ago."

He took a step toward her, started to speak as she yanked the pull ring on the memory module. Kenyon blinked into nothingness.

She carried the module off the ship, met Benson coming up the ramp.

"They sent me back, ma'am. You were inside a long time. We thought something might have happened."

Sally shook her head. "Just found a memory module in need of calibration." She paused. "And I looked around a bit. I used to know her crew before she was converted to robot tripping."

"Kelly told me," Benson said. "Her pilot came back dead a long time ago. And his wife died on board before that."

Sally stared at the younger woman. "Kelly told you a lot."

Benson blushed. "I'm sorry, ma'am. It just seems so sad that she goes out on robot like that—empty of all who loved her."

Sally looked back at the *Lady-L*. "Except the ghosts," she said under her breath.

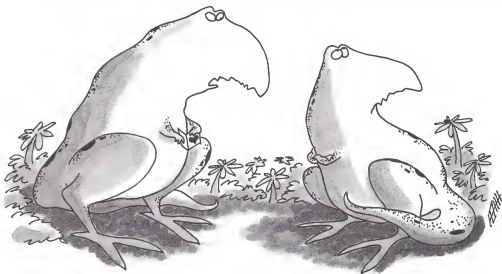
"What, ma'am?" Benson asked.

"Nothing," she replied. "C'mon, Benson. Let's get to decon and out of this armor."

It was night at the spaceport, long after shift. Sally sat in the dimly lit decon section, waited for the safe signal from the chamber holding the *Lady-L*'s memory module. As she stared through the durite window at the black cube, the safe sign flashed green.

She removed the module from the chamber and snapped it carefully into a carrying case. Starting tomorrow she was giving herself a long holiday. It would be a few weeks before the *Lady-L* could lift. Then he could be with his old love, a ghost with a ghost out between the stars.

But you're in port, Kenny, Sally thought, catching a reflection of her greying hair in a polished equipment console. And in port you're mine. ♦



"Really, I'll probably love your card. But it takes a few minutes for the sentiment to reach my brain."

The Fifties: Dream Worlds

Mike Ashley

The garbage cans at the Ziff-Davis offices must have been full at the close of 1949. It was then that Howard Browne took over from Ray Palmer as editor-in-chief of the Ziff-Davis fiction magazines. He disposed of 300,000 words of purchased manuscripts, clearing the decks of the Shaver-inspired material that had haunted *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* during the last five years. Browne had a free hand under publisher Bernard Davis to make the magazines respectable.

L. Sprague de Camp, writing in his *Science-Fiction Handbook* in 1953, described Browne as "a huge massive man with a bone-crushing handclasp and, like Palmer, a keen commercial sense." It was Browne's desire to convert *Amazing* into an up-market glossy magazine. He was of the view that the days of the pulp magazine were over. Since the world had become aware of the devastating power of the nuclear bomb, science fiction had come of age, and had earned a small respectability among the higher-class magazines. Several sf writers from the pulps, including Robert A. Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, and Murray Leinster, were now selling regularly to up-market magazines such as *Collier's* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, and Browne believed there was a space in that market for an all science-fiction magazine.

It meant paying good money. He raised the promised payment rates, previously only about one cent a

The Amazing Story Part 4

word, to five cents. He made the rounds of the leading literary agents seeking quality stories, and secured promises from Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon, Fritz Leiber, Clifford Simak, and other major names. By April 1950 he was ready to put together a dummy issue (which has since become a collector's item)—and then the axe fell.

In June 1950 the North Koreans invaded South Korea. With the American economy suddenly redirected toward combating the invasion, budgets were cut and the gamble of a slick *Amazing* was dropped as too risky. The stories Browne had purchased made their way into the pulp pages of *Amazing*, among them "Operation R. S. V. P." by H. Beam Piper and "Satisfaction Guaranteed" by Isaac Asimov. The news of Browne's plans had caused other agents to reconsider *Amazing* as a market, and this had brought in stories from other big names—Fritz Leiber, William F. Temple, Fredric Brown, Clifford Simak—so that by the end of 1950 there was a glimmer of quality about *Amazing* that had not been evident for many years.

A sure sign of an improving market is when a magazine begins to encourage and foster new writers—

the lifeblood which enables science fiction to develop. Rapidly, under Browne's editorship, the stable of Ziff-Davis writers (Rog Phillips, Berkeley Livingston, Don Wilcox, Chester Geier) found itself being nudged aside by talented newcomers. John W. Jakes, better known these days for his *North and South* Civil War novels, made his first sale to Howard Browne in 1950. ("Your Number Is Up!" was in the December issue.) Other members of the vanguard of new talent included Mack Reynolds, whose first sale to *Amazing* was "United We Stand" (May 1950); Milton Lesser (known today as historical writer Stephen Marlowe), who debuted in November 1950 with "All Heroes Are Hated!"; Charles Beaumont, who contributed "The Devil, You Say?" in January 1951; and Walter M. Miller, Jr., whose first professional sale was "Secret of the Death Dome" (January 1951). All four of these men were destined to become leading sf writers of the 1950s.

A final break with the old era came at the close of 1950, when Ziff-Davis decided to move its editorial offices to New York. (The production side of the operation remained in Chicago.) Browne was quite happy with the move, as was

his associate editor Lila Shaffer, but William Hamling, who had done the bulk of the editorial work since Palmer began to phase himself out in 1948, was less enthusiastic; he had too many connections in Chicago. So Hamling followed in Palmer's footsteps and established his own publishing company, called Greenleaf. Hamling took over publication of *Imagination*, a magazine started for him by Palmer. He later moved into the market for men's magazines with the highly successful *Rogue*.

The move to New York was completed by early 1951. It meant that the members of the old stable of Chicago writers were no longer regulars in the magazine, and Browne was able to secure stories from a wider range of writers via direct contact with the New York agencies. However, the benefits of this changeover took some time to materialize.

Lila Shaffer had now taken over as managing editor under Browne's overall control. Browne had every confidence in her, regarding her as highly competent and an excellent editor. But, like Browne, she had little knowledge of or interest in science fiction. *Fantastic Adventures* fared better for material of reasonable quality than did *Amazing*, primarily because of the editor's greater interest in fantasy fiction. Once the backlog of "slick" stories was used up, *Amazing* reverted to the routine space-adventure magazine it had been in the 1940s. Typical of its contents was the Michael Flannigan trilogy: "The Land Beyond the Lens," "The Golden Gods," and "The Return of Michael Flannigan." These stories were written by Stuart J. Byrne under the alias of John Bloodstone, in the style of Edgar Rice Burroughs. The series, which ran in the March, April, and August 1952 issues, pitched Flannigan into another world where he became a superhero fighting against astonishing odds. Nothing new there. In fact, as an aside, it's a sad reflection that most fantastic fiction written today isn't far advanced from that, yet remains equally popular.

Overall, 1952 was not a good year for the kind of image Browne had hoped to engender. Too often

the stories, through their titles, continued to project the old pulp style of adventure, such as in Don Willcox's "The Mad Monster of Mogo" (November 1952) or Milton Lesser's "Secret of the Black Planet" (June 1952). Even though most of the stories weren't too bad, they still projected the feeling that *Amazing* was a Burroughs-inspired magazine. In fact, some readers regarded Browne as a Burroughs-style writer and suspected the Bloodstone stories were his work. There was an image about the magazine that was impossible to overcome in the pulp format.

There was also the astonishing inclusion of a series of works I'm surprised Browne condoned. These were the "Master of the Universe" stories, which ran from April through November 1952 and were credited to "Author Unknown" (or, in the last two installments, "Author Unborn"). The series purported to be a manuscript giving the future history of Earth from 1975 to 2575, complete with serious footnotes and references to future sources. Like the Shaver Mystery, it was presented as fact, and it created a modicum of reaction from readers—some of whom asked for copies of the future books! One of the footnotes in the series refers to a book by John Evans, which was a pen name of Browne's. Some years ago I wondered whether Browne had written this series, as a retaliation to the budget cuts and so as a way of expressing his frustrations at not being able to develop the magazines. When I put this question to him in 1982, he had no recollection of the series. I am still unsure who did perpetrate it, and would be interested to hear from anyone who might know. The series did nothing to further the image of *Amazing Stories*.

By 1952 science fiction was undergoing a surge of popularity in the United States. Scores of new science-fiction magazines had appeared in the last few years or were now appearing, and two of the newest—*Galaxy*, edited by Horace L. Gold, and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas, were vying with *Astounding* for

honors as the leading sf magazine. Indeed, these titles were already known as "The Big Three." *Galaxy* was closest to the image that Browne had wanted. Gold selected a more sophisticated style of science fiction—not hung up on technology, as *Astounding* so often was, but concentrating on the human angle.

Ever since 1943, *Astounding* had been published in a small pulp format, only a little larger than the digest size that had become established among literary magazines and reviews. When *The Magazine of Fantasy* (as it was initially called) appeared in October 1949, it also followed the digest format, as did *Galaxy* a year later. The day of the pulp magazine was passing into history. Many of the young readers whom the pulps had attracted were switching to comic books, while older readers were turning to the rapidly growing market in paperback books. Television was also just starting to make its mark, and some of the old-guard pulp writers were finding it more lucrative to continue their trade writing for television.

All of this meant that 1952 a major change was happening in the magazine market, though many publishers were unsure what direction to take. Ziff-Davis thought it would test the waters of the digest-magazine market, and this gave Browne a second opportunity to create his dream magazine. Since his heart was in fantasy rather than sf, Browne opted to launch a new fantasy magazine called, simply, *Fantastic*. Unlike the slick magazines, which required significant advertising revenue to sustain their high-quality production, the digest magazines were only pulps in reduced format, and Ziff-Davis was therefore able to invest money in increasing word rates.

Fantastic promised up to ten cents a word for leading writers. It also sought to go up-market by including two-tone color interior artwork, as well as wraparound covers.

The first issue of *Fantastic*, dated Summer 1952, appeared on March 21, and is a beautiful issue to behold, even now. A delicious cover by Barye Phillips, depicting a witch, heralded a collection of stories by

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top writers, including Raymond Chandler, with a little-known story reprinted from *Park East Magazine*, "Professor Bingo's Snuff." Other writers included Walter M. Miller, Kris Neville, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, and Horace Gold. The writing was sharp and sophisticated, a long way from that appearing in *Fantastic Adventures* or *Amazing Stories*. Some readers criticized that the magazine's quality was not as high as had been expected, but it was on a par with *F&SF*, and showed much promise for the future.

Soon after the second issue had appeared in June, *Fantastic* shifted to a bimonthly schedule. The third issue, which boasted a Mickey Spillane novelette, "The Veiled Woman," allegedly sold 90 percent of its print run, which was almost unheard of in publishing circles. (The May 1984 issue of this magazine contains a fascinating article by Howard Browne, in which he talks about his experiences as editor and also offers an interesting insight into the true story behind "The Veiled Woman" and how it came to be written.)

Ziff-Davis was satisfied. Browne was given a \$200-a-month raise and the go-ahead to convert *Amazing Stories* to a digest magazine. He was also given the budget to employ a new editorial assistant. Browne selected Paul W. Fairman, a versatile thirty-six-year-old writer he had discovered two years earlier. Fairman had become a prolific contributor to the Ziff-Davis pulps under a variety of pen names, the most notorious being "Ivar Jorgensen." Over the last year Fairman had been actively involved in launching a new magazine, *If*, the same magazine that became *Galaxy's* companion in the 1960s and won a bunch of Hugo Awards. Soon after his appointment, Fairman replaced Lila Shaffer as managing editor when she left Ziff-Davis to marry.

By early 1953, *Fantastic Adventures* had merged with *Fantastic* and, after its March 1953 issue, *Amazing Stories* became a digest and shifted from a monthly to a bimonthly schedule. That shift in frequency of publication came as something of a shock to readers, and it suggests that

Ziff-Davis was still not wholly confident about the format change. The money the company was plowing into the two titles in production costs and enhanced word rates had to be balanced somehow, and one way to reduce the financial outlay was to put out fewer issues over a given span of time.

Nevertheless, Browne pulled out the stops editorially. Despite his lack of interest in science fiction, he now tightly held the editorial reins, personally selecting all the stories for *Amazing* and *Fantastic*. The first digest-sized *Amazing* included stories from Robert Heinlein ("Project Nightmare"), Theodore Sturgeon ("The Way Horie"), Richard Matheson ("The Last Day"), Murray Leinster ("The Invaders"), and Ray Bradbury ("Here There Be Tygers"). It had a feel of sophistication about it, at least when compared to the previous pulp issues, though the initial impact came from the pen-and-ink illustrations rather than the stories. Art editor Leo Ramon Summers, together with artists Robert Kay, Charles Berger, David Stone, and Henry Sharp, had gone for an economical spidery style that reflected simple carefree imagery rather than scientific detail or sense-of-wonder action. Only Ed Emshwiller and Virgil Finlay retained their usual styles.

The magazine was a critical success, and was welcomed by the more serious reader, but it was a giant leap for the average pulp-adventure fan for whom *Amazing* had served as a monthly ticket to the planets. Overnight, *Amazing* had changed its market and was trying to attract a new one. This strategy might have worked in less competitive times, but with the scores of magazines then vying for attention on newsstands and store shelves, *Amazing* found it difficult to stand out.

Browne's own separation from the past is perhaps most evident in the blurb he wrote for Arthur C. Clarke's story, "Encounter in the Dawn," in the second digest issue:

A lot of glib fiction has been written about life on other planets, with space ships dropping down among

alien races, zap guns decimating the enemy, while Our Hero goes battling off after a Beautiful Princess, who is about to be ravaged by the hairy-nosed glumpfx of Pluto. But Mr. Clarke . . . takes the realistic approach and gets better results than anything by the boom-boom boys.

So much for Ray Palmer's "Gimme bang-bang" approach, which had been the cornerstone of *Amazing's* editorial philosophy in the previous decade.

For a period in the second half of 1953, *Amazing* could revel in its attempts to equal or better "The Big Three." There were stories by Robert Sheckley ("Restricted Area," June; "Beside Still Waters," October; "The Perfect Woman," December), Philip K. Dick ("The Commuter," August; "The Builder," December), and Henry Kuttner ("Or Else," August), all of which stand the test of time. Richard Matheson contributed "Little Girl Lost" (October), which became the subconscious inspiration for Steven Spielberg's 1982 film *Polyester*.

There were further quality stories from William P. McGivern, Evan Hunter (author of the 87th Precinct novels under the pseudonym Ed McBain), and Algis Budrys.

One noticeable feature of all the best stories from this period is that they are scarcely science fiction at all, but convey a deeper mood of the fantastic or the unnerving, bringing a more adult feel to the treatments of their themes. They were certainly far from the type of science fiction that had been contained in the earliest issues of Hugo Gernsback's *Brinchild*.

If there is one author whose work best represents the era of the early digest-format *Amazing*, it is Walter M. Miller, Jr. He had three stories apiece in *Amazing* and *Fantastic* during this time. "Death of a Space-man" (*Amazing*, March 1954) is typical. It isn't a science-fiction story at all—it's the memories of Old Donagel, a space pioneer, as he lies dying. Yet within the story Miller manages to convey the perils and the loneliness of space exploration better than in any thrill-a-minute adventure yarn. Joe De Bolt and John R.

Pfeiffer, writing in Neil Barron's *Anatomy of Wonder* (3rd edition, Bowker, 1987), said of Miller's stories from this period that they brought "a depth of character and richness of meaning to sf unusual for the times and, with them, bridged the gulf from the pulps to the mainstream." That was exactly the effect Browne wanted. Had he been able to keep Miller as a contributor, *Amazing* may well have published his award-winning masterwork, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, but instead this sold to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, where it began to appear in early 1955.

It is ironic, but perhaps not altogether surprising, that today we can look back at the early digest issues of *Amazing* and remark upon the quality of the stories and the caliber of the writers. Yet at this time *Amazing* was being outsold by rival magazines, some of which had little if any quality material in their contents. Browne's roots were firmly in the pulp tradition, and he (and the magazine) remained a victim of that market; it could not be escaped overnight. Whereas three years earlier Browne's dream of a quality slick magazine had been quashed before it was even born, now his heart was hit as the reality became a gathering nightmare. Another dream was shattered.

Within a year of the launch of the digest, *Amazing's* budget was cut. The word rates dropped, the leading authors faded away, and the magazine became a dim shadow of its recent former self. Fairman left in the summer of 1954, leaving Browne to edit the magazine on his own, supported only by the Ziff-Davis secretarial staff.

Less than a year after the magazine's brief golden period, we find Browne having to admit to a few problems. In the March 1955 issue, one letter writer took Browne to task, cataloguing all of the problems now plaguing *Amazing* in its degeneration over the last year. He summed it up by asking, "What happened to this mag?" Browne responded:

Not enough readers will buy the magazine to justify the tremendous costs involved. It was your editor's

argument that a magazine containing the best of everything in the science-fiction field—best paper for best reproduction of the best artwork illustrating the best stories, plus the use of color—would bring a couple of hundred thousand steady readers every issue. We were wrong—and the figures were not long in arriving to prove us wrong. Sure, circulation mounted, but nothing like it had to justify the expense involved. We stuck to our guns as long as we could, but the day arrived when retrenchment was in order. We bated to back down; but in view of the circumstances it would have been foolhardy not to.

Curiously, at this low ebb, Ziff-Davis decided to put *Amazing* back on a monthly schedule, starting with the December 1955 issue. But this only meant more work for Browne, and with his dreams shattered, he lost interest in the magazines. He left them to more or less edit themselves.

"Many of the stories appearing in the Ziff-Davis magazines were never read by me," he told me some years ago. At the time when Fairman and Shaffer were supporting editors, this arrangement may have been fine, but it was probably not the case when Browne was editing solo. (After all, *someone* had to read them.) It is more likely that he has simply forgotten these years, during which he compiled the issues more as a chore than a mission. Instead, he spent his time writing two suspense novels, *Thin Air* and *The Taste of Ashes*, the first books published under his own name. He was delighted when, in 1956, he received a call from a television producer who had read the books and invited Browne out to Hollywood to try his hand as a screenwriter.

Browne jumped at the chance, though he took a few months' leave of absence first before taking the plunge full-time. To cover for him as editor, Browne called back Paul W. Fairman. Fairman had still been writing regularly for the Ziff-Davis magazines, sometimes almost filling entire issues under a collection of house names.

Fairman and Browne worked to-

gether in compiling *Amazing's* bumper 30th anniversary issue for April 1956. The fiction in it was all reprinted material, selected from the magazine's archives, but the nonfiction was new, including a whole cabinet of curiosities where personalities of the day were asked for their predictions about what the year 2001 would be like. The luminaries included Salvador Dalí, Dr. Robert Lindner, Philip Wylie, Steve Allen, and Sid Caesar (who was uncanny in his prediction of global television).

Shortly after that issue hit the stands, Browne hit the road. Fairman took over full responsibility for the magazines, assisted by a young woman, Cele Goldsmith, who had recently been brought onto the payroll to help Browne with an ill-fated correspondence magazine called *Pen Pals*.

Fairman's style of editing was not Browne's. He was a production-line writer, and had cut his teeth on the Palmer issues of the magazine. He saw no problems with the old policy of authors writing a set monthly wordage and publishing the stories under house names. After all, that's what he did with his own work. So, back came E. K. Jarvis, Gerald Vance, and P. F. Costello to join Ivar Jorgensen, Lee Archer, Clyde Mitchell, and other names designed to deceive—only this time the *real* writers had changed.

The bulk of the copy in *Amazing* during the mid to late 1950s was produced by the latest generation of writers: Robert Silverberg, Milton Lessor, Harlan Ellison, Henry Slesar, Randall Garrett, and Fairman himself. Although the younger ones were still learning their trade, these were all good writers, and while they might now disown what they churned out for *Amazing* and *Fantastic* during those days, much of it was readable by the standards of the time. Its main trouble was that it was predictable, formula material, using standard plots and characters. Fairman enjoyed basic conflict stories, usually man versus environment, or man against enormous odds, with man invariably triumphant at the end. Those by Garrett were often light-hearted, those by Silverberg charmingly innocent, and those by Ellison

harsh and downbeat. Otherwise they were basically the same story.

Silverberg's first story for *Amazing* was "Hole in the Air" (January 1956), the start of a relationship which, thirty-five years later, is still going strong. Silverberg—under his own name and numerous pseudonyms—is *Amazing's* most prolific contributor.

In addition to his affinity for basic conflict stories, Fairman also believed that sex helped sell issues. He spiced up story titles, and even launched a magazine of wish-fulfillment stories with a heavy emphasis on sex, called *Dream World*. This publication arose following the success of a special "dream" issue of *Fantastic*, but *Dream World* was not everyone's heart's desire, and it lasted only three issues (February, May, and August 1957).

Little of merit survives from the Fairman years. The 1950s were the days of the science-fiction B-movies, and Fairman seemed to equate sf too closely with the archetypal monster movie or alien invasion. Indeed, the movie industry inspired another companion magazine, *Amazing Stories Science Fiction Novel*, which attempted to bridge the gap between paperbacks and magazines. It saw only one issue, in June 1957, which consisted of a novelization by Henry Slesar of the Columbia film *20 Million Miles to Earth*.

Fairman also had a passion for UFOs, and he made the October 1957 *Amazing Stories* a "special flying saucer issue." Apart from two UFO stories, written pseudonymously by Algis Budrys ("If These Be Gods" by "Gordon Jaylyn") and Harlan Ellison ("Farewell to Glory" by "Ellis Hart"), the issue was given over to a "Flying Saucer Forum," with contributions from Ray Palmer, Kenneth Arnold, Gray Barker, Richard Shaver, and the United States Air Force.

Although many people were interested in the UFO enigma, not all readers would have welcomed the return of Shaver to *Amazing's* pages. But there was more to come. Fairman devoted much of the July 1958 *Fantastic* to the Shaver Mystery. The circulation of both magazines was dropping, and it looked as if Fairman was following Palmer's lead of the previous decade by pandering to the fringe cults.

Fairman had, until this time, been able to indulge himself because Bernard Davis (whose primary interest had been the fiction magazines) had stepped down as president of the company in July 1957. He bought Mercury Publications, which published *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and established his own Davis Publications. The company continues to this day in the

hands of his son, Joel Davis, and publishes *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* and *Analog* (formerly *Astounding*), among other titles.

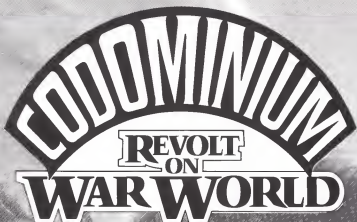
The new publisher of *Amazing*, Michael Michaelson, who was also vice president in charge of circulation, was not as indulgent, and was anxious to see *Amazing* paying its way. Changes were in store. In September 1958 Fairman left Ziff-Davis to return to writing, which he did with moderate success under a host of pseudonyms until his death in 1977. His place was taken by his assistant, Cele Goldsmith.

The Fairman years saw *Amazing* at its worst, equating with the dullness of the Sloane era twenty years before. The magazine was read predominantly by young people, to whom it clearly appealed (a pen-pal column, "The Space Club," brought responses mostly from readers in the 12-to-15 age range), but they were turning more to comics and television. The time was due to change *Amazing's* image again, and seek a new market. Cele Goldsmith felt up to that challenge. She assumed the editorship of *Amazing* with its December 1958 issue, and started the climb back to glory. We'll revel in her success next month. ♦

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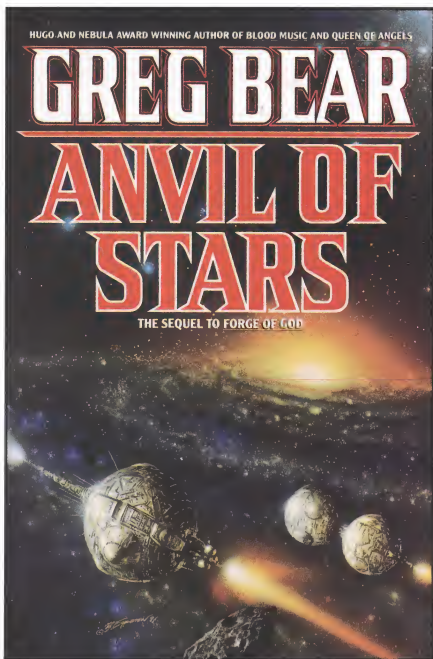
Distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, Ny 10020

Looking Forward:

Anvil of Stars

by Greg Bear

Coming in May 1992 from Warner Books



Introduction by Bill Fawcett

Greg Bear's latest book, a sequel to *The Forge of God*, picks up where the earlier story left off—in more ways than one. Like its predecessor, it is a science fiction tale of tremendous scope that also tells a story on a very personal level.

Following the cataclysmic events that ended the earlier book, the survivors of planet Earth's destruction are aboard a huge ship waiting for the terraforming of Mars to be completed. Then they learn that galactic law has decreed that the civilization that brought about the death of Earth should itself be destroyed . . . by the surviving victims. A new ship is built and manned by volunteers from among the younger survivors.

As this excerpt opens, the ship has been traveling for months and has now come upon a star system that may be the home of those who were responsible for the destruction of Earth.

Only hours. Time flying by more swiftly, more in tune with the outside universe. Another partition drill; equally successful. One last brief external drill, also successful. The children seemed as prepared as they would ever be.

Hour by hour, Hakim's search team produced more and more information. The time of judgment had arrived.

In the schoolroom, in the presence of the War Mother, Martin set up the rules for the judgment. In the first year,

Cover art by B. Epperson

Text of excerpt copyright ©1992 Greg Bear

Stephanie Wing Feather and Harpal Timechaser had prepared the rules, trying to catch the resonances of the justice systems established on the Ark, based on human laws back to the tablets of Hammurabi . . .

A jury of twelve children was chosen by lots. Each child could refuse the assignment; none did. With more qualms than satisfaction, Martin saw Rosa inducted as a juror, taking the oath Stephanie herself had written:

I will truly judge based on the evidence, and what I will judge is whether the evidence is sufficient, and whether it proves guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. I will not allow prejudice or hate or fear to cloud my judgment, nor will I be swayed by any emotion or rhetoric from my fellows, so help me, in the name of truth, God, the memory of Earth, my family, and whatever I hold most dear, against the eternal guilt of my soul should I err . . .

The choosing and swearing-in lasted a precious hour. A defense advocate was appointed by Martin; to Hakim's dismay, Hakim chose him. "No one knows the weakness of your evidence more than you do," Martin said. He was acutely aware of the roughness and arbitrariness of this system they had chosen; they could do no better.

As prosecutor he appointed Luis Estevez Saguaro, Hakim's second on the search team. Martin himself presided as judge.

The War Mother listened to the trial silently, its painted black and white designs prominent in the brightly illuminated schoolroom. All eighty-two children sat in quiet attendance as Martin went over the rules.

Luis presented the older evidence, and then outlined the new. Their data on the debris fields had increased enormously. The assay matches seemed indisputable.

Hakim questioned the conclusiveness of the data at this distance. Luis Estevez called on Li Mountain to explain again the functioning of the *Dawn Treader's* remotes and sensors, the accuracy of observations, the science behind the different methods. The children had heard much of it before. They were reminded nevertheless.

Luis Estevez withheld his trump card until the final phase of the six-hour trial. Hakim fought vigorously to discredit this last bit of evidence, explaining the statistics of error on such observations at this distance, but the news made the children gasp nonetheless, more in horror than surprise.

Less than two hours away, at their present speed of three quarters c, the cloud of pre-birth material surrounding Wormwood offered one more startling confirmation.

The residue of Wormwood's birth, a roughly shaped ring around the system, with patches and extrusions streaming billions of kilometers above the ecliptic, had been extensively mined, as suspected, and few volatiles remained. No cometary chunks were left to fall slowly around Wormwood; the civilization had many thousands of years ago depleted these resources as part of a program of interstellar exploration.

Some leftovers from that program still floated amid the scoured dust of the irregular ring, spread here and there across the billions of kilometers like sand in an ocean tide.

The search team, probing the nearest extent of the

ring, had found artificial needle-shaped bodies, the largest no more than a hundred meters long; inert now, perhaps experimental models, perhaps ships that had malfunctioned and been abandoned after being stripped of fuel and internal workings.

Luis projected for the jury, and all the children, graphics of what these needle ships looked like in their cold dusty junkyards. He then produced pictures they were all familiar with: the shapes of the killer machines when they entered Earth's solar system, when they burrowed into the asteroids between Mars and Jupiter, and into the Earth itself:

Long needles. Identical in shape and size.

Hakim valiantly argued that these shapes were purely utilitarian, that any number of civilizations might produce vessels such as these, designed to fly between the stars. But the shapes of Ships of the Law, including *Dawn Treader*, countered that argument. Space allowed many designs for interstellar craft.

The conclusion seemed inevitable: dead killer machines orbited the extreme perimeter of the Wormwood system.

Hakim's next suggestion was that this system had itself been entered by Killers, that the inhabitants had been wiped from their worlds, and that the worlds were not perpetrators, but victims. Luis countered that in such a case, it was their duty to expunge the final traces of the Killers from the victim's corpse.

And if there were survivors?

That did not seem likely, judging from Earth's experience.

But the Earth, Hakim argued, had been an extreme case; the Killers had been faced with strong, eventually fatal opposition. Perhaps they would behave differently with more time to perform their tasks. Perhaps there were survivors.

Luis pointed to the natural composition of Wormwood and its planets, the apparent origin of the machines themselves.

And if the machines had merely been manufactured here?

The debate went around and around, but these arguments were not convincing, however Hakim worked to make them so.

"If Wormwood is indeed the origin of the killer machines, why leave these wrecks out here for evidence?" Hakim asked, making his final attempt at a sound defense. "Why not sweep the cloud clean, and prepare for the vengeance of those you have failed to murder? Could there not be some other explanation for this evidence, allowing a reasonable doubt?"

No one could answer. No one doubted the evidence, however.

The jury was sequestered in unused quarters near the schoolroom.

The verdict was two hours in coming.

It was unanimous.

Wormwood must be cleared of all traces of Killers and their makers. Even if they had become ghosts, lost in their machines . . .

Hakim seemed perversely despondent that he had not presented his case more strongly. He moved to the rear of the room and curled behind the children, eyes wide and solemn.

Martin stood before the children, the weight of the judgment on his shoulders now. The hush in the school-room was almost deathly: no coughing, hardly a sound of breathing. The children did not move, waiting for him to issue the orders.

"We start dispersal as soon as we split," he said. "Shipboard weapons team will launch makers into the Wormwood system. There are no visible defenses, but we'll be cautious anyway. Instead of trying for three or four large-mass gravity-fuse bombs, we'll let the makers create a few thousand smaller ones out of the rocks and debris. If we fail, makers in the outer cloud will assemble their weapons and send them in later."

"That'll cost much more than fuel," Hans said. Stephanie and Harpal nodded.

"There aren't enough volatiles to make enough bombs and escape quickly. We should act as soon as possible. We'll destroy the rocky worlds first, then concentrate on the bald gas giants . . ."

"Destroy them, too?" Ariel asked from the rear.

"If we have enough weapons," Martin said. "We can gather the remaining volatiles for fuel from the debris clouds afterward."

"All of them?" William asked.

"Every world," Martin said.

The children thought this over somberly. They would reenact the battle fought around the Sun, centuries past. This time, *they* would be the murderers.

"It's not murder," Martin said, anticipating their thoughts. "It's execution. It's the Law."

That didn't make the reality any less disturbing.

"You didn't need to put me in your crew," Theresa said as they ate together in her quarters. This was the last time they would have together, alone, until the Job had been completed. These were the last four hours of the *Dawn Treader* as a single ship, as they had always known her. If they survived, they might reconstruct the

ship again, but chances were, they would have to make her much smaller, perhaps a tenth of her present size, and live in comparatively crowded conditions . . .

"I had no reason *not* to have you with me," Martin said.

Theresa watched him, eyes bright.

"The Pan needs to think of himself now and then," Martin said softly. "I'll work better, knowing you're with me."

"When we finish the Job, where will we go?" she asked, finishing her pie. The ship was an excellent provider; this meal, however, tasted particularly fine. There would be little time to eat after partition, and the meals would be fast and small.

"I don't know," Martin said. "They've never told us where they'll send us."

"Where would you *like* to go?"

Martin chewed his last bite thoughtfully, swallowed, looked down at the empty plate. He smiled, thumped his knuckles on the small table, said, "I'd like to travel very far away. Just be free and see what there is out there. We could travel for thousands, millions of years . . . Away from everything."

"That would be lovely," she said, but she didn't sound convinced.

"And you?" Martin asked.

"A new Earth," she said. "I know that's foolish. All the Earthlike worlds are probably taken, but perhaps the moms could send us to a place where nobody has been, find a planet where we would be alone. Where we could make a new Earth."

"And have children," he said. "Where the moms could let us have children."

"No moms," Theresa said. "Just ourselves."

Martin considered this, saw nations arising, people disagreeing, history raising its ugly head, the inevitable round of Eden's end and reality's beginning. But he did not tell Theresa what she already knew. Fantasies were almost as important as fuel at this point.

"Do you think they'll know when they die?" Theresa asked. Martin understood whom she meant. *Down at the bottom of the gravity well, on the planets. The Killers.* ♦

Looking Forward:

A Fine & Private Place

by Peter Beagle

Coming in May 1992 from Roc Books

Introduction by Bill Fawcett

If there is an author who comes close to J.R.R. Tolkien in stature and for his impact on fantasy, that person has to be Peter Beagle. His novel *The Last Unicorn* is a classic of the genre and one of the few such tales that converted well to a video presentation.

Beagle's strength is in making improbable characters seem real, and making it easy for the reader to understand and care about them. This wonderfully crafted novel begins after the main character, Michael Morgan, has died—an event that certainly does not mark the end of the adventures that he finds on earth.

A Fine and Private Place is not a new work, but this release will be the first opportunity for most readers of fantasy to enjoy it. Following are a number of brief excerpts that illustrate the strong flavor and intensity of Beagle's writing.

It was a rather small funeral procession, but it had dignity. A priest walked in front, with two young boys at his right and left. The coffin came next, carried by five pallbearers. Four of them were each carrying a corner of the coffin, and the fifth was looking slightly embarrassed. Behind them, dressed in somber and oddly graceful black, came Sandra Morgan, who had been the wife of Michael Morgan. Bringing up the rear came three variously sad people. One of them had roomed with Michael Morgan in college. Another had taught history with him at Ingersoll University. The third had drunk and played cards with him and rather liked him.

Michael have liked his own fu-



Cover art and illustrations by Darrell Sweet

neral if he could have seen it. It was small and quiet, and really not at all pompous, as Michael had feared it might be. "The dead," he had said once, "need nothing from the living, and the living can give nothing to the dead." At twenty-two, it had sounded precocious; at thirty-four, it sounded mature, and this pleased Michael very much. He had liked being mature and reasonable. He disliked ritual and pomposity, routine and false emotion, rhetoric and sweeping gestures. Crowds made him nervous. Pageantry offended him. Essentially a romantic, he had put away the trappings of romance, although he had loved them deeply and never known.

The procession would its quiet way through Yorkchester Cemetery, and the priest mused upon the transients of the world, and Sandra Morgan wept for her husband and looked hauntingly lovely, and the friends made the little necessary readjustments in their lives, and the boys' feet hurt. And in the coffin, Michael Morgan beat on the lid and howled.

Michael had died rather suddenly and very definitely, and when consciousness came back to him he knew where he was. The coffin swayed and tilted on four shoulders, and his body banged against the narrow walls. He lay quietly at first, because there was always the possibility that he might be dreaming. But he heard the priest chanting close by and the gravel slipping under the feet of the pallbearers, and a tinkling sound that must have been Sandra weeping, and he knew better.

* * *

Mr. Rebeck and Mrs. Klapper walked along the road, past the frozen fountains of the willow trees, and Mrs. Klapper talked about the place where she lived, and about the old woman who sat in front of her house on warm days, and about her niece, who was beautiful, and her butcher, who gave you bad meat unless you were a friend of his, and about her husband, who had died. They stopped sometimes to look at the high, empty houses and to admire the angels and children that watched over them, and the swords and sphinxes that guarded them. Then they walked on again, and Mr. Rebeck spoke once in a while, but for the most part he listened to Mrs. Klapper and took pleasure in her words.

He wondered why this should be, why the things this woman was saying should delight him so, particularly when he barely understood them. He knew very well that the great majority of human conversation is meaningless. A man can get through most of his days on stock answers to stock questions, he thought. Once he catches onto the game, he can manage with an assortment of grunts. This would not be so if people listened to each other, but they don't. They know that no one is going to say anything moving and important to them at that very moment. Anything important will be announced in the newspapers and reprinted for those who missed it. No one really wants to know how his neighbor is feeling, but he asks him anyway, because it is polite, and because he knows that his neighbor certainly will not tell him how he feels. What this woman and I say to

each other is not important. It is the simple making of sounds that pleases us.

Mrs. Klapper was talking about a little boy who lived on her block. "Eleven years old," she said, "and every time I meet him with his mother, he's written a new poem. And always she says to him, 'Herbie, tell Mrs. Klapper your new poem.' She hits him until he says the poem. Eleven years old he is, last March."

"Are the poems any good?" Mr. Rebeck asked.

"What do I know from poems, I should give an opinion? They're all about death and burying people, always. This from a boy eleven years old. I feel like telling her, 'Look, keep him away from me with the obituary column. He writes a poem about a bird, about a dog, bring him around.' But I never tell her. Why should I hurt the boy's feelings? I see them coming, I cross the street."

She said, "Look, there we are already," and Mr. Rebeck looked up to see the black gate.

The gate was of cast iron, set into turreted pillars of sand-colored concrete. Dark green ivy covered it, twined a little thicker than ivy generally grows, and cast-iron snakes with patient eyes pushed their resigned way through the ivy. It was topped with a row of blunt spikes, and it stood open. Mr. Rebeck could see the street outside.

"Here we are already," Mrs. Klapper marveled. "Such a short walk when you're talking to someone."

"Yes," Mr. Rebeck said.

* * *

He shrugged. "And there you are. I stayed. At first I thought I'd just rest for a while, because I was very tired, but the raven brought me food—" He grinned suddenly. "The raven was there when I woke up, waiting for me. He told me he'd bring food as long as I stayed, and when I asked why, he said it was because we had one thing in common. We both had delusions of kindness."

* * *

In the back of the truck the raven had been joined by a small red squirrel who had dropped out of an overhanging tree as the truck passed under it. The squirrel was thin, with large bright eyes, and he sat on one of the chains that held the tailgate shut and demanded, "What on earth are you doing?"

"Making a good-will tour," said the raven, who disliked squirrels even more than pigeons. "What does it look like I'm doing?"

The squirrel drew his front paws close against his furry chest. "But you're a bird!" he said in amazement.

"Why aren't you flying?"

"I've retired," said the raven calmly.

The truck took an exceedingly tight curve, and the squirrel nearly lost his balance on the chain. He recovered himself with a small squeak of alarm and stared at the raven. "Birds are supposed to fly," he said a little querulously. "Do you mean you're never going to fly again?"

It had come very gradually to the raven's attention that the motion of a truck on a gravel road is quite different from flight. There was a faint murmur of discontent from his stomach, distant as heat lightning still. "Nev-er," he said grandly. "From here on in, I'm a pedestrian."

* * *

Michael turned around suddenly. "But I'd like to know what sort of reason she'll give for my committing suicide. She's a fertile-minded woman, but this is for the big money."

"Could she say you'd been—oh, depressed lately?" Mr. Rebeck asked.

Michael snorted. "That was what we fought about. I wasn't depressed. She thought that any man in my position ought to be depressed. My position—she made it sound as if I were tied to some Indian rotisserie." He swung away again and prowled restlessly to the foot of the mausoleum. "Maybe I was, in a way. But Sandra was dancing around the stake, yelling like hell and pouring on the kerosene."

For a moment Mr. Rebeck thought he winced. His image rippled slightly and seemed to fade. Then it was whole again, as if it were a reflection on water and a stone had broken it.

"She didn't mind me being a teacher. Don't think that. She just wanted me to be an important teacher. She was getting a little bored with cooking dinner for me and a few students, and playing the *Threepenny Opera* record in the living room afterward. A hungry woman, my Sandra. Wanted me to realize myself, to be everything she knew I could be. A hungry woman. Very sexy, though. She was a beautiful hair."

He was silent then, standing in front of the dirty white building, throwing no shadow on the barred door.

What a fine spot for a few words, Mr. Rebeck thought, from a wise and understanding man. I must write away for one. Perhaps I could put an advertisement in the paper. The raven could figure out something. We could have a wise and understanding man in residence. Somebody ought to.

Michael was looking straight in front of him. Now, without turning his head, he said quietly, "Your lady's coming."

"What?" Mr. Rebeck asked. "Who's coming?"

"Way the hell down the path. Can't you see her?"

"No," Mr. Rebeck said slowly to Michael's side. "No, not yet. Tell me."

"You know the one. The widow. The one who's got a husband buried around here."

"I know her," Mr. Rebeck said. He stood on tiptoe and strained his eyes. "Yes, I do see her."

"Probably coming to visit her husband again," Michael said. He glanced sideways at Mr. Rebeck.

Mr. Rebeck bit a knuckle. "Oh, dear," he said. "Oh, Lordy."

"You seem nervous. Anticipatory, one might say. Shall I go away somewhere and count my toes?"

"No, no," Mr. Rebeck said quickly. "Don't do that."

He began to take shuffling steps backward, still watching the small figure that approached.

"Taking rather the long way around to visit her husband, isn't she?"

"Yes. I was just thinking that."

"If you're trying to hide behind me," Michael said, "it seems a little pointless."

Mr. Rebeck stopped moving backward. "I wasn't hiding. But I wish I could think of something to say to her. What can I say?"

"Something beautiful," Michael replied carelessly. He began to drift off slowly, like a lost rowboat. "Something crippled and beautiful."

"I wish you'd stay," Mr. Rebeck said.

"I thought I'd go and see about Laura. You've got company. She may want some." He grinned at Mr. Rebeck over his shoulder. "Just be darkly fascinating."

* * *

But then she saw a man standing before the statue of a boy reading a book. The boy's face had the picture-book impersonality of the Christs that flanked him, but something—the round chin, perhaps, or the big ears—made him look young and human. The unlined slickness of marble had trapped a little of that youth. On the front of the bench there was an inscription. Below it were two dates.

The boy himself was sitting on the bench, next to the statue. He was smaller than the statue and very thin and tenuous; a thin line marking a boy's shape in the air. Against the stained marble of his statue and with the sun behind him, he was nearly invisible. The man in front of his grave spoke softly and foolishly, and the boy never moved.

The man reached out a hand to touch the statue and Laura was quickly and completely jealous. She thought, Oh, this is bad, this is really bad. Leave him alone. Must you even envy dead children? You were better alive, when you didn't dare let people see how jealous you were. The familiar swelling ache was in her, for this is an ache of the mind that does not need the body to express itself.

"He comes to see you now," she said to the boy, "to show everyone how much he misses you. But he'll stop coming someday. What will you do then?"

The boy did not turn to her and this infuriated her. It was as if he too were alive and she were the only one of them who could not be heard.

"You'll sit and wait," she said. "He'll never come, but you'll sit and wait for him. People will come to see every grave in the cemetery, but not yours. You wait and look up whenever anyone passes by, but they don't come. They never come. You think you have him now, but you've no one but me, no one but Laura to talk to you and be with you. You're dead now, and you have only me."

But the man murmured softly to the statue, and the boy listened, and the statue continued to read its stone story. ♦

The Fermi Paradox

Stephen L. Gillett

Interstellar flight is possible, even with the lightspeed limit. People like Bob Forward have shown how, such as by propelling lightsails with giant lasers based in space or on Mercury, or by maser propulsion of light Starwisp probes, or even by antimatter propulsion, using a little antihydrogen squirted into lots of hydrogen.

And if we can figure this out, with our presently primitive level of technology, anyone else can too.

So where are the spacefarers?

Well, maybe they're here already, just watching till humans prove themselves worthy of the Galactic Federation, or prove so dangerous they must be exterminated, or whatever. This notion, the "zoo hypothesis," has been proposed many times in many forms, both in SF and by scientists.

But even if most extraterrestrial civilizations have a "hands off" ethic, certainly all of them wouldn't. And even under a "hands off" policy, surely social scientists (for instance) could get permits to do studies. Why have there been no slip-ups? (Not to mention unauthorized visitors, such as poachers.) And don't point to UFOs as examples of such. First, virtually all UFO reports are clearly not the result of extraterrestrial activity (the "residual unexplained" is vastly smaller than many people would have you think). Second, if the reports are to be believed, the UFO pilots are incredibly incompetent. (Even for academic investigators!)

Some writers who profoundly misunderstand the dynamics of life

have said that all this proves is that no rapacious civilization has ever gotten loose in the Galaxy. But that's not the problem at all. Life expands by its very nature, individually but inexorably. It doesn't even need to be animal life: look at the weeds taking over a vacant lot! Botanists, in fact, have been astonished by how fast the area devastated by the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens, in Washington State, is reseeding and regrowing.

All you need is individuals striking off for the next star system once in a while. No galactic Pizarro or Cortez lusting after gold and conquests; no Alexander seeking new worlds to conquer; only lots of individuals doing their own thing. But it adds up: over geologic time, even a modest expansion rate of a light-year or two a century suffices to settle the entire Galaxy in a few tens of millions of years—a geological eyeblink.

So where are they?

In fact, the Universe seems inorganic, in its ancient meaning of "unorganized." People such as Freeman Dyson have commented many times that it's strange how well simple physics and chemistry explain the observed Universe. Sure, there's lots of weird stuff out there, neutron stars and black holes and exploding galaxies, but all seem perfectly explainable without intelligence. If intelligence were truly loose in the Universe on a large scale, surely we'd see things we couldn't explain. It would be like contrails over the Primitive Area. We might not under-

stand what was going on, or why, but we'd surely see something!

So if spacefarers weren't rare, we'd *know* by now; we'd see 'em! This is called the Fermi Paradox, after Enrico Fermi, who reportedly asked, "Where are they?" in response to speculation about extraterrestrial civilizations.

The most depressing explanation of the Paradox is that life is just extremely rare. Maybe the Earth is even unique. Certainly life is rarer than had been thought probable even a generation ago. Since then, we've found Venus to be totally dead, and Mars is virtually certain to be dead as well—and both were once thought to have a chance of supporting life.

It's certainly possible Earthlike planets are very rare. In a previous column I described how the habitable zones around a star may be thinner than people had thought. If a water planet's a bit too warm, it may have a runaway greenhouse and end up like Venus. If it's too small, it may dry out and freeze up like Mars, as the CO₂ in its atmosphere permanently precipitates out into limestone. And on top of everything, a star's luminosity steadily increases over its main sequence life, as helium "ash" accumulates in its core. So the habitable zone's a moving target!

But let's rethink a minute. In the Fermi Paradox we mean technological life, life that can at least communicate, if indeed not travel, across

interstellar distances. So maybe life is not rare, but spacefaring or space-talking intelligence is.

This is a bit more encouraging. Maybe there are lots of scumglobs out there, worlds supporting only microbes as did the Earth for the first four billion years of its history. Maybe algal mats happily growing in the sunshine, untroubled by grazers and other "higher" life forms as the sea sloshes in and out over them, are the usual representatives of Life. And the land is still virgin and serene, as yet uninhabited by living things of any sort.

Still, that's kinda dull. Sure, there are myriad questions of comparative biochemistry that biologists could study, but—how do you talk to an algal mat?

It need not be all that dull, though. Even once metazoans (multicelled life forms) have evolved, there may be few body plans that can lead to technical intelligence. Stephen J. Gould has emphasized, for example, that of all the *outré* forms preserved in the Burgess Shale (and of which only a handful survived to become the ancestors of modern living things), only a few could have led to technological life. (See my column, "Aliens of the Past," September 1991. I should point out, by the way, that biologists like Gould are much more skeptical about the ubiquity of intelligence than "contact optimist" astronomers such as Carl Sagan or Frank Drake.) So planets with thriving, complex ecosystems, even including land life and air life, might still never achieve intelligence or spaceflight.

Why? Consider what technical intelligence requires: fire and metal, the beginner's blocks of technology. This in turn implies land-based critters. But furthermore: this implies big critters. If a body type can't get to be big, it can't get to be intelligent, even if it's land-living. Insects, for example, are well adapted to land life. But they can't get much bigger because of the way they breathe.

And land dwelling may lead to yet another constriction. SF author and scientist David Brin has pointed out that there might be lots of intelligent creatures stuck on otherwise Earthlike planets with no land area.

They'd either be confined to the sea themselves, or else there's too little land for a "critical mass" to have the technological breakthrough. After all, you probably need a lot of land—just an island or two won't do. In fact, the very diversity of environments on lots of land area may help spur intelligence.

Even if lots of land exists, how it's distributed may be a problem. On our Earth, plate tectonics continually shoves the continents around, smashing them together to form mountain ranges, then splitting them up again as the patterns of seafloor spreading shift. And, every now and then most of the continents get gathered together—on Earth, most recently as the "supercontinent" Pangea, which formed about 250 million years ago and started to split up maybe 100 million years later. Presumably, as I described in my column "Plate Tectonics, Oceans, and Life: The Planets Earth" (February), any Earthlike planet also has oceans and plate tectonics, and so will also make supercontinents once in a while—at least if it has any land area at all.

That's a problem if intelligence arises then, because supercontinents aren't prime real estate. They have horrible climatic extremes because so much of the land is far from the moderating effect of the oceans. Only the coastal fringe would be really habitable, and have the prospect of providing the economic surplus to make a civilization with.

Alternative biochemistries, such as those using ammonia or sulfur dioxide as solvents instead of water, are also poor bets for spacefarers. Developing a spacefaring technology under such conditions is pretty unlikely. I've devised a twist of my own along this line—a planet where some free chlorine exists in addition to water and oxygen. Fires would burn just fine, but you can't have metals!

In fact, even if all is well for technological intelligence on an Earthlike world—large land-based critters, lots of usable land area—social barriers to the development of spacefaring may be profound. (As far as that goes, it's not at all clear that humanity will manage to become starfarers.

Stupidity and shortsightedness may yet keep us from the stars, at least in this cycle of civilization.)

John Barnes, an SF writer with a social-science background, has pointed out that the evolution of technical civilization seems to require surmounting a set of social hurdles—from agricultural villages to nation-states, for example. Surmounting such organizational hurdles is not inevitable. It's as though a culture has to aim exactly right to get through a narrow sociological window to the next level. Generally the first culture to try doesn't make it.

One example is the transition from simple, casual farming to the sort of organized agriculture along a river valley that gave birth to civilization. The problem is, when people settle down to grow things, then it's very easy for nomads to swoop down, clobber them, and take all their grain. And even if no marauders happen by, an embryonic river-valley civilization generates its very own barbarians, just from outlaws or other misfits who leave the valley.

Something like this probably happened to the ancient Indus civilization, which we still know little about. More interestingly, there seem to have been many other embryonic civilizations along the Black Sea coast and possibly in interior Asia too, on rivers debouching into the Caspian and Aral Seas. These almost-civilizations never reached a critical mass; they'd build up for a few generations and then be wiped out again, over and over.

Mesopotamia apparently passed this threshold because with two rivers close together, the civilized folk could reinforce each other and help keep the nomads at bay till they could invent effective armies. Egypt may have survived because it is surrounded by desert—there *were* no marauders, at least usually. (How the Chinese on the Yellow River managed to survive I don't know.)

Once you've got a city-state, you need to invent bureaucracy. That's hard to think of as an advance, but it was! You need some way to ensure people will stay loyal and at work even without the king right there with his army. A civil service

that provides security and advancement is such a mechanism.

Now that you have a river-valley civilization, though, you still have lots of hurdles. In fact, the first hurdle is the civilization itself: it's a "water empire" such as Karl Wittfogel described in his classic study on oriental despotism. A water empire is an irrigation civilization in which a central priesthood/government can maintain absolute control indefinitely—because it controls the irrigation works and can mete out the water. This is *too* stable! (As William McNeill has noted, the invention of iron first broke down the ancient Middle Eastern water-civilizations because it made weapons cheap. Each barbarian warrior could have an iron weapon; but the ruling elite in the river civilizations, who were armed with bronze, dared not arm their peasants with iron to fend off the barbarians!)

Civilization also does not imply advanced technology. To be sure, as the use of iron and bronze—not to mention agriculture—shows, civilization implies some sort of technology. But it's "empirical" technology, the sorts of inventions you can figure out without a theoretical basis, just with some tinkering—and some luck. They include things like simple smelting and metalworking; water and windmills, the bow and arrow. In fact, such things probably were independently invented several times.

Such technology can even get quite sophisticated, though it's still completely empirical. Several technical revolutions came between, say, the bow and arrow and the forging of Damascus steel for swords. Such technical advance is no doubt favored once a (generally oral) craft tradition arises, so that the experience of one generation of smiths can be passed to the next. Of course, contact with other cultures who'd made different inventions also helps a lot.

Lynn White, for example, was fond of pointing out the "dark" ages in Europe saw many technical advances over the ancient world. The horse collar is a favorite of some SF writers, but it was only one of a constellation: the moldboard plow, the stirrup, the whippetree (the tongue of a wagon, which lets you build

large wagons because you then can use several horses hitched in a team to haul them), the horseshoe, gunpowder, windmills, and so on. Some of these innovations, of course, were imported from China or the Arab lands, but European tinkers fused them into their own craft traditions.

For really sophisticated technology, though, you need science and the scientific method. Cut and try, even over generations, will take you only so far. You can't make an electric motor or vacuum tube—much less a microchip—that way.

And, inventing modern science seems to be another hurdle. It was invented only in Europe, and arose from an improbable fusion of the craft, empirical approach *and* the theoretical, scholarly approach.

It was improbable because these traditions are completely antithetical, at least with humans. Scholars generally look down on artisans. They try to identify with the ruling classes, who don't work with their hands. On the other hand, artisans and craftsmen sneer at the otherworldly pretensions of the scholars, who tend to come across as all hot air with no connection to reality. These complementary attitudes seem typical of a hierarchical agricultural social structure—but that's the sort of structure from which civilization arose! Such attitudes developed in China, the ancient western world, the ancient Near East—in fact, just about everywhere.

The empirical/scholarly fusion never quite happened in Greece, for example, although it came close several times (in Periclean Athens, for example, when craftsmanship was still appreciated and trade was important, and also later, in the early post-Alexander period). Although the empirical tradition was respected initially, the scholars later retreated into the ivory tower—especially after the Roman conquest and the rise of new religions including Christianity. The religious ferment also undercut the craft tradition by deemphasizing the empirical approach to nature. (The prevalence of slavery in the ancient world also couldn't have helped; it would make freemen look down on anything involving manual labor.)

The fusion didn't happen in Chi-

na, either; Chinese technology advanced and backslid several times, without ever breaking out of the purely craft mold. During the Han dynasty, for example, there was lots of empirical technical innovation—but the government, anxious to consolidate control, rapidly established a central bureaucracy. Too much innovation became a threat to the established order, so it was stifled.

Why, then, did modern science arise in Europe? One explanation has been Europe's political disunity. Since the fall of Rome and the rise of northern Europe, Europe has been fragmented into different sovereignties. And with everyone striving for an advantage, no one could afford to let scholarly prejudice stand in the way of economic or military innovation. William McNeill has developed this idea thoroughly in *The Rise of the West and The Pursuit of Power*.

Nonetheless, this can't be the whole explanation, because it didn't happen in China. Political disunity there, during the first Warring States period (which was about contemporary with Periclean Athens), motivated Confucianism and Taoism. Both of these philosophies emphasized the following of custom and the "natural way" in an attempt to stop the continual warring. As a by-product they also discouraged innovation.

All this also suggests, by the way, that monarchies and empires are bad places to develop science—ironic, given the infatuation with monarchy and empire in some science fiction!

Commercial trading societies, on the other hand, are much more open to the sort of innovation that leads to science. They can't afford to scorn empirical knowledge, and they also can have the wealth—i.e., economic surplus—to support scholars. Ancient Greece almost invented science in the heyday of Athenian trade. The merchants in early Ming China might have made a similar breakthrough, but—as was traditional—they were soon squelched by the central authorities. And of course, early modern Europe was seething with merchants all striving to get rich.

(Of course, even now the empiri-

cal/theoretical fusion is not perfect in science. You still hear echoes of the old tensions, such as between experimentalists and theoreticians, or between "pure" vs. "applied" science, or between "engineering" vs. "science." But at least they have to talk to each other once in a while now. If only grudgingly.)

Last, we should also remember that the social setting will interact with the physical setting. For example: a planet with little land area, on which a polity could establish political control over essentially all the surface using only Roman-Empire type technology, could easily stagnate and even collapse back to barbarism.

An Earth example is the fate of the culture on Easter Island. When Polynesians stumbled across it, a tiny speck of land thousands of miles from any other, they settled it as they had many others. They over-exploited their environment, though; when they cut too many trees, they could no longer build boats. Then they were stuck at a barbaric level with no prospect of escape. It's hard to see how the arrival of Westerners made things worse here!

Even with lots of land area, stagnation might occur, depending on how the land's arranged. For example, suppose all the land's in a supercontinent whose coasts are all accessible with primitive craft. No long ocean voyages would be needed to reach essentially all the usable land, and the interior is so hostile there's no barbarian threat from that direction. Thus an empire that conquered all the coasts could rule forever.

Our Earth, by contrast, in this geologic era has land and sea widely distributed across latitudes, such that it's difficult to reach all lands without a fairly sophisticated technology. This ensures that lots of social experiments can first take place in geographic isolation.

From scumworlds to worlds free of intelligence; from all-ocean worlds to supercontinent worlds; from embryonic civilizations huddled along a river valley to ancient empires hugging the coasts of a supercontinent: Maybe there's a whole universe out there stuck on their home planets, just waiting for us to come visiting! ♦

About the Authors

When we announced the upcoming publication of "Missing Person" by **William F. Wu** on page 96 of last month's magazine, we did so with a line that began "Welcome back to Wong's Lost and Found Emporium." Long-time readers, and some other people as well, should have immediately recognized that name. In fact, this is the third Emporium story to appear in these pages.

Bill's first journey into this strange place, simply titled "Wong's Lost & Found Emporium," was in the May 1983 issue. It went on to be a nominee for all three of the major awards in the field—Hugo, Nebula, and World Fantasy. It was adapted for the small screen and ran as an episode of *The New Twilight Zone* in 1985. At just about the same time that show was first broadcast, Bill's second Emporium story was published ("Indigo Shade, Alizarin Light" in the January 1986 issue). And now, we're proud to present the third story in the same setting—illustrated by Doug Chaffee, who also did the artwork for the two earlier pieces.

"Life in the Air" is the sort of powerful story you might expect from a couple of powerful writers—**Barry N. Malzberg** and **Jack Dann**. Both of them have more accomplishments than we could possibly list here; suffice it to say that it's a genuine honor to welcome them back. Barry, a former editor of this magazine, has had ten stories published here previously, the last one almost ten years ago ("Anderson," June 1982). Jack's most recent appearance was a collaborative effort with Gardner Dozois and Michael Swanwick, "Afternoon at Schrafft's," which ran in the March 1984 issue.

Since we last saw **James Morrow** in these pages, his novel *Only Begotten Daughter* was announced as the co-winner of the 1990 World Fantasy Award. "Isabella of Castile Answers Her Mail" is Jim's contribution to the next *What Might Have Been* anthology, titled *Alternate Americas*, which is due out in October to commem-

orate the 500th anniversary of your-know-who's journey.

Marcos Donnelly broke into print in auspicious fashion with stories in the second and third *Full Spectrum* anthologies. "Spare Time for Willy Todd" is his second appearance in a professional magazine and, of course, his AMAZING® Stories debut.

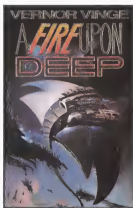
Our second joint effort this month, "Prisons," comes from **Kevin J. Anderson** and **Doug Beason**, whose recent novel *The Trinity Paradox* was reviewed in our October 1991 issue. They've teamed up six times so far on short stories and novels, including an earlier piece for this magazine ("If I Fell, Would I Fall?" in September 1988).

On the basis of his two recent appearances here, **Dan Stedronsky** is not liable to be pigeonholed as a writer who does only one type of story. His latest offering, "Home Is Where the Heart Is," could be considered a humorous story—which "Insomniac" (January 1992) certainly is not. But as you'll see, the humor in this new story has a bit of an edge to it.

Warren Brown makes his debut in this magazine with "Oh the Blackness Will Make You Dance," which is his fifth published short story, including a couple of sales to *F&SF* and an appearance in *Omni* in the early 1980s.

If things continue the way they've been going, **James Alan Gardner** is apt to become one of the new breed of AMAZING Stories regulars. "The Young Person's Guide to the Organism" is Jim's third story for us in the space of ten issues—and so far, every time we've bought a story, he has sent us a new one. He seems to be quite versatile, but there's one topic he promises to stay away from. "I got my Masters in Applied Math by doing a thesis on black holes," he tells us. "I will never ever write a story about black holes." ♦

Book Reviews



A FIRE UPON THE DEEP

by Vernor Vinge
Tor Books, April 1992
416 pages, \$21.95 (hardcover)

Vernor Vinge has long been one of the best writers of innovative, thought-provoking, character-as-well-as-science-driven SF. His previous books—*Grimm's World* (rewritten recently), *True Names*, *The Peace War*, and *Marooned in Realtime*—all aptly demonstrate his strong talent, and are works which warrant rereading. However, it is only with his latest, *A Fire Upon the Deep*, that Vinge seems to hit his stride as a novelist. It's a near classic.

A Fire Upon the Deep depicts a universe divided into zones of thought: the Unthinking Depths near the core of our galaxy, where machinery functions on only the most primitive levels; the Slow Zone just outside that, where computers are dumb and it's impossible to exceed the speed of light; and the various levels of the Beyond, where the possibilities for achievement—mechanical and mental—increase geometrically the farther out you go. You can even reach godhood, or near enough to it.

When a human archaeology/settlement team digging in the ruins of an old High Beyond civilization accidentally awakens a malignant artificial intelligence from a billion-year hibernation, they try to escape but are crushed like insects . . . except for one small starship carrying mostly children in coldsleep.

It seems this new, malignant Power—called a Perversion—tried to conquer the universe once before, by literally placing every machine and every intelligent being under its direct personal control. It was defeated . . . though by what nobody knows.

That's the setup; the story is progressed in alternating points of view. One storyline follows the survivors from the refugee ship as they land on an uncharted planet in the Slow Zone and make contact with the (mostly unfriendly) natives: doglike creatures who assemble into small packs, reaching a smart-as-humans group intelligence. The other storyline follows a human librarian as she becomes accidentally thrust into the forefront of the effort to stop the Perversion. It seems the germ of the weapon needed to defeat the Perversion may have been on the refugee ship; if she and her friends can get to it in time . . .

The fate of the universe hangs in the balance. There are political and cultural diplomacies to deal with; there are strange aliens; there is courage and treachery and sacrifice, all painted on a huge canvas.

A Fire Upon the Deep is excellent on nearly every level. My one problem with it is that not enough of the canvas is shown: another set or two of alien viewpoint characters, each representing a group with a different agenda, each coming in from a different viewpoint on the Perversion, would have helped. And, toward the end, there is an undercurrent of "So

what if the High Beyond falls to the Perversion? Life goes on for the rest of us." (That's not good storytelling: making the reader care about the characters, making their problems matter, is important to dramatic tension; undermining that tension is Not A Good Thing.)

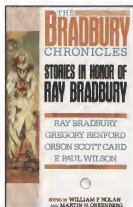
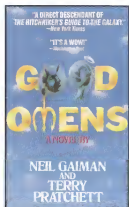
These are, however, minor quibbles: buy this book next. You will enjoy it. A lot. — J. Betancourt

REQUIEM

by Robert A. Heinlein
Tor Books, February 1992
341 pages, \$21.95 (hardcover)

There are two schools of thought when it comes to Heinlein: one holds that he was a hack and seriously damaged the literary quality of the field. (This view is primarily held by the more lit'ry Europeans, as far as I can tell: most American SF readers cut their teeth on Heinlein.) The other school holds that Heinlein was the greatest science-fiction writer of all time, bar none, and every word he ever wrote is of immense value to the field and should be cherished. (That's why Heinlein's novels are now appearing uncut for the first time. From the three uncut versions I've read thus far, though, I'd say the cuts actually improved the books: it just goes to show that even the best writers need editing.)

Dead almost four years now, Robert A. Heinlein continues to produce new books at a rate worthy of Philip K. Dick. This latest, *Requiem*, is



more of a rounding-up of stray stories and speeches, with some appreciations tacked on to lengthen it up, than anything else. Despite that, it makes an interesting addition to Heinlein's body of works.

There are five stories: "Requiem," available elsewhere, one SF story reprinted from *Boy's Life* (with some minor plot similarities to *Farmer in the Sky*), "Destination Moon" (upon which the film is based, probably why it's never before been reprinted), and two mainstream stories for teenagers (one appearing in print for the first time), both of which are more interesting because of who wrote them than what they're about.

Ah, but the speeches! Here we get a glimpse of the man behind the fiction: witty, articulate, and very opinionated. If you're interested in more than the fiction, you should probably start with his collection of letters, *Grumbles from the Grave*, then proceed directly here. They're the closest you're going to get to knowing the man behind the words.

The appreciations are interesting, but we already know how influential Heinlein was to American SF. Pournelle, Sheffield, and a slew of others provide their thoughts.

Requiem in hardcover is probably for the more dedicated Heinlein aficionados. Those who go into it expecting more from the nonfiction than the fiction won't be disappointed. — J. Betancourt

CHINA MOUNTAIN ZHANG

by Maureen F. McHugh

Tor Books, March 1992

320 pages, \$19.95 (hardcover)

China Mountain Zhang, McHugh's first novel, is set in the near future after the collapse of the capitalist governments and the takeover of North America by the Red Chinese. The environment created by this is highly bureaucratic, stagnant, and comes across as dystopic. Engineer Zhang is an ABC, or American Born Chinese. This is better than being Caucasian, but still not the same as being Chinese-born. Because of this, his options are limited unless he gets lucky enough to earn a transfer to Shanghai to study.

Zhang has a couple of problems, though. His genetic heritage isn't pure. Also, he's gay. That deviance, if it became known, would be a capital offense. Homosexuality isn't tolerated in any way under this regime. It exists, however, as do all of the aspects of humanity that go underground when repressed. You don't make gambling or prostitution go away by outlawing it—you just make it harder to see.

China Mountain Zhang could be described as a cyberpunk novel—it's reminiscent of Gibson's *Neuromancer*, but without being derivative. The high-tech gloss, the dystopic atmosphere, the focus on the struggling of the lower classes—the people trying simply to survive a system that isn't out to destroy them,

but simply doesn't notice them.

Through this, Zhang tries to find his way to his personal success without stepping onto one of the many land mines people and society toss in his way.

While the lead character is gay, this is not a book about gender issues. McHugh isn't educating us about gay life, or catering to gay readers. That's simply part of the characterization she uses to make him come to life. It's a strong recommendation for the author's characterization that as I read, I tended to forget that Zhang is a homosexual.

China Mountain Zhang is a well-written book about real people trying to survive in a society where the best they can hope for is benign neglect. It's a gripping story that made me care about the characters, and one of those rare books I didn't want to put down. I think McHugh is going to be an author to watch in the future. — C. Von Rospach

TWISTOR

by John Cramer

AvoNova, November 1991

338 pages, \$3.99 (paperback)

Hard SF is an increasingly rare part of the field today. Between the speed with which scientific knowledge changes and the difficulty in being both entertaining and accurate, very few writers in the modern world have the time, skills and ability to write a story that will please both the people who check the science

and those who demand a good story. That's why it's heartening to see a new author successfully tackle the hard SF sub-genre.

In *Twistor*, John Cramer's first novel, he takes us inside a research lab of a major university to watch the discovery and evaluation of a radically different technology. Cramer, a professor of physics at the University of Washington in Seattle, uses his background in research and university politics to not only create an interesting technical widget, but also to create a convincing environment to explore that widget in.

The widget is the Twistor effect, which is a convincing piece of smoke and mirrors that creates a "tunnel" between two parallel universes. This isn't something that's possible under physics as we know it—but the idea behind hard SF isn't to stick to known facts; it's to extrapolate beyond in a way that sounds as though it's based on known physics. Cramer does this well; assuming you accept his basic premise of the Twistor effect and the implications it creates for our reality, the rest of the story sticks to the reality he's created with great and convincing precision.

What really grabbed me about *Twistor*, though, was the way Cramer shows how science is conducted. These aren't stereotypical scientists in lab coats thinking great thoughts, but a real-world research lab with real people trying to make sense of nonsensical results while keeping their grants alive and protecting their intellectual property rights to their findings.

The story follows David Harrison, and Vickie Gordon, both studying for their Ph.D.'s under professor Alan Saxon. Saxon has a business on the side that attempts to create commercial applications of research findings, which in turn is heavily in debt to the large, stereotypically nasty company Megalith. When David and Vickie realize they've got their hands on something very different, they start looking at ways to publish the findings and finish their dissertations on the process. At the same time, though, Saxon decides to try to get control of the Twistor field for his

company's benefit while hiding it from Megalith, while Megalith, realizing Saxon is hiding something, tries to find out what it is so they can steal it from everybody.

While Megalith is a stereotypical bad guy in the book, Cramer seems to have crafted the stereotype intentionally, and turns the one-dimensional aspect of the firm into an advantage by playing it to the hilt, with spy networks, secret codes, hired killers and all sorts of nasty stuff. Saxon isn't a bad person, but is simply more interested in protecting his own interests than those of his research lab or the people who work for him. All hell breaks loose when Saxon decides to take the Twistor machine away from David and Vickie to his own company for further research, and Megalith attempts to grab it before Saxon can. At gunpoint, David uses the Twistor machine to transfer himself—and the machine—to wherever the Twistor machine sends things. The problem, of course, is how to get back, how to protect Vickie from Saxon and Megalith from the other side of a Twistor effect and how to protect their own interests and get out of this disaster successfully—and alive.

Cramer walks us through a fascinating extrapolation into alternate universes, particle physics and weird pieces of science that many scientists don't completely understand. He does so convincingly and in a clear way that shouldn't confuse or mystify the reader. It's a good job of making the science clear without making it stupid. At the same time, he's also telling a gripping and fun suspense story.

Twistor is not only much better than the average first novel, it's one of the better novels I've read this year, period. It's also an indication that hard SF, while rare, isn't dead yet. — C. Von Rospach

REQUIEM: New Collected Works by Robert A. Heinlein

edited by Yoji Kondo
Tor Books, March 1992
352 pages, \$21.95 (hardcover)

Robert Heinlein was one of the most

powerful, if not the most powerful, influences on the science fiction field during his lifetime. His domination of the field as an author, in fact, went beyond SF and strongly influenced many areas of society. Since his death in 1988, there has been one book of his letters (*Grumbles from the Grave*) published, but there is still a strong interest in Heinlein and his career, and a lot of information to be made available.

Requiem is the next step in that process. This book compiles a selection of Heinlein's writings, speeches and poetry. A second section contains the transcripts of the National Air and Space Museum's Heinlein Retrospective from 1988, including speeches by Tom Clancy, Jerry Pournelle, Charles Sheffield and L. Sprague de Camp. The final section is a series of tributes by the friends and peers of Heinlein, including Larry Niven, Spider Robinson, Jack Williamson, Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, Greg Bear, and Robert Silverberg.

Some of the fiction will be familiar. The title story is a piece familiar to most readers of Heinlein, being the story of Harriman's visit to the moon and his death there. Harriman, the "Man Who Sold The Moon" in Heinlein's *Future History*, was no longer able to travel to the moon for health reasons once it was finally possible to do so, and this story tells of how he finally got to, and died on, the place he loved so dearly. It is also a very powerful epitaph for Heinlein himself.

There is one story in the book, "Tenderfoot in Space," that has never been reprinted before. It was written a year before Sputnik and originally published in *Boy's Life* and hasn't been seen since. While the science is somewhat dated (we now know that Venus is uninhabitable), that doesn't matter—it's a strong, well-written, typical Heinlein story about a family emigrating to the frontier and coming to grips with a hostile environment. It's as fresh and accessible as if it'd just been written, and is a classic example of why Heinlein's works will still be in print and read long after his detractors are forgotten. It was a real joy for me to

be able to sit down with a piece of virgin Heinlein and rediscover why his writing was so important to me while growing up.

The entire book is fascinating and helps bring Heinlein into perspective, perhaps not so much as a person as an influence. Obviously aimed at Heinlein fans, it's a well-thought out volume with a lot of interesting and new material. Let's hope that it is followed by more similar volumes, including a good biography of the Heinleins. — *C. Von Rospach*

GOOD OMENS (The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch)

by Neil Gaiman

and Terry Pratchett

Ace Books, March 1992

368 pages, \$8.95 (trade paperback)

Humor is a very personal thing. Think about the number of jokes you've told that bombed. Imagine trying to write a funny book. There aren't many writers who can do it. Esther Friesner and Craig Shaw Gardner in America are two talents who come to mind. In Britain, one of the current masters of mirth is Terry Pratchett.

Pratchett has left his Discworld series for a while and teamed up with comic-book writer Neil Gaiman. The result is *Good Omens*—the story of Armageddon as only a British writer could tell it.

Crowley is a demon who has been a field agent on Earth for a few thousand years, and he has finally been given orders to prepare for the Antichrist and the coming of Armageddon. Unfortunately, he has come to like Earth and doesn't want to see it end, so he and his counterpart from Heaven, Aziraphale, decide to see if there's something they can do to stop the final conflagration.

Things don't go quite as planned. When the Antichrist is born at the hospital run by the Satanic Nuns of the Chattering Order of Saint Beryl, there's a little mixup, and he goes home with the wrong family. In a cute play on the genetics-versus-environment argument, we end up with a normal boy who just happens

to be the cause of the end of the world as soon as he turns eleven—and Crowley has misplaced him. Unless they can find the Antichrist and convince him not to go through with Armageddon, their cushy field jobs are finished and it's back to their respective home offices.

What does Agnes Nutter have to do with all of this? Agnes was a witch and a prophetess. Unlike most prophetesses, she was a real one and could see the future, although what she saw didn't necessarily make sense. She wrote it all down, including Armageddon, in her own inimitable (and impossible to decipher, except in hindsight) style. She even predicted her own death, and chastised the mob when it arrived ten minutes late. Through a series of events that make sense only if you believe in predestination (which Agnes Nutter's ability implies as possible), Aziraphale gets control of the last existing copy of her book just in time to figure out where the Antichrist is, and just in time for everyone to converge on the climactic final scene, at which . . . Well, that would be telling.

This is a fun book to read and, for me at least, frequently sidesplitting. If the plot is forced at times, and if the ending is somewhat arbitrary, it doesn't matter. A good time is had by all—unless you don't like British humor. If you're one of those people who hated Monty Python, give this one a miss. Otherwise, you might find this to be one of the best funny books to come along in a while. — *C. Von Rospach*

THE MEMORY OF EARTH

by Orson Scott Card

Tor Books, March 1992

336 pages, \$19.95 (hardcover)

I'm not sure yet whether to be impressed with *The Memory of Earth*, wary about the series it begins, or frustrated with Orson Scott Card for beginning yet another examination of the same issues raised by his Ender and Alvin Maker books before finishing either of those series. One certainly can't fault Card for lack of ambition, though; the template for

this new SF cycle is nothing less than the Bible itself.

That statement calls for an immediate qualifier: *The Memory of Earth* is by no means a straight science-fictional retelling of its source material. Card has significantly rearranged and reinterpreted characters, and extrapolated a sharp division of temporal and religious power between the sexes that doesn't arise from biblical lore. But the Old Testament parallels are strong. Wealthy landowner Volemak is modeled on Abraham, the patriarch who leads his family away from their comfortable urban existence on a search for a legendary promised land. Nafai, youngest of his four sons and the novel's protagonist, is an analogue of Joseph, whose unique religious insights are met with cynicism and jealousy by his two oldest brothers. And the book's climax centers around an artifact that can be compared with the Ark of the Covenant.

The characters, particularly Nafai, Volemak, and the elusive Oversoul, are the core and highlight of the novel; where Card's *Xenocide* was about ideas, *The Memory of Earth* is about people. We watch Nafai's family deal with plenty of internal and external conflict, and their responses are perceptively human, as impulsiveness wrestles with judgment and plausible flaws balance each character's strengths.

Structurally, the novel is less successful. Though the biblical parallels are too evident to ignore, Card's intent in creating them is frustratingly unclear. So far, there are no striking theological divergences from the source material, and nothing in the book suggests that any are forthcoming. And Card's control of viewpoint is surprisingly awkward at times; one late section jumps suddenly out of Nafai's head into a jarringly opposite mindset.

Then, too, faith, free will, and idealism under stress are hardly new issues for Card. The spin may be different this time, but *The Memory of Earth* doesn't seem distinctive theologically from the Alvin Maker novels, and it also shares themes and patterns with the Ender books. The

window-dressing is new enough, but not sufficiently convincing to justify a third parallel examination of the same ground.

From an unknown writer, *The Memory of Earth* would be a major new work promising the rapid take-off of its author's career. From Orson Scott Card, it's no more than a step sideways, and readers won't be sure whether Card has landed on an escalator or a treadmill until the next books are available. — *J. Bunnell*

BICYCLING THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

by Mike Sirota
Ace Books, December 1991
202 pages, \$3.99 (paperback)

Comic fantasy novels are thick on the ground nowadays, but comic science fiction remains fairly rare. So it's especially pleasant to find a funny SF novel with a combination of craziness and good craftsmanship to recommend it. *Bicycling Through Space and Time* is such a book.

The cover is both right and wrong in classifying Mike Sirota as a writer "in the tradition of Douglas Adams." Structurally, it's a good analogy. Like Arthur Dent, Jack Miller spends most of his literary time traveling from weird world to weird world, having more or less self-contained adventures at each stop. And as with Arthur, Jack travels for the sake of traveling rather than out of a desire to actually get anywhere in particular.

But stylistically, Sirota's style and tone are a far cry from the *Hitchhiker's Guide* series. Where Adams takes a detached, newscasterlike approach to his chronicles, Sirota offers a relaxed first-person yarn—with a narrative voice that you wouldn't be surprised to hear spinning out its tale in the bar or the hospitality suite at an SF convention.

"Relaxed," mind you, may be a misleading word. Certainly it doesn't describe Jack while he's trekking across a jungle world on foot (someone has stolen his bicycle), or while he's meeting Ralph Ralph ("call me Ralph"), who may also be God, or while he's saving the galaxy's most popular amusement park from a ter-

rorist threat. And yet Jack takes each new encounter in stride, pedaling from one world to the next with the effortless rhythm that only comes from long practice.

The comedy is plentiful, but of a sort that doesn't lend itself to citing examples or quoting punchlines. It's also a friendly brand of humor, tailored to a storyteller's needs rather than a stand-up comic's. But it's not the only thing the novel has going for it. Sirota has also put together a good setup: Jack's new 21-speed bike has had a secret extra gear planted on it by an alien study group devoted to trying to understand humanity ("We had trouble with this. Can you explain Lotto?"). They'll watch him out of trouble on a highly limited basis, but for the most part Jack will be on his own on the Ultimate Bike Path.

Lots of writers can tell jokes and make horrendous puns. Not many can tell the kind of cheerfully gonzo story that leaves you in a mellow mood for a good couple of hours after you've finished reading. Sirota is solidly in that second category, and *Bicycling Through Space and Time* is that sort of book. — *J. Bunnell*

THE BRADBURY CHRONICLES

edited by William F. Nolan and
Martin H. Greenberg
Roc Books, November 1991
328 pages, \$19.95 (hardcover)

If anyone had asked in the planning stages, I'd have said this anthology was utterly impossible to pull off. Rarely have I been more pleased to be wrong; with few exceptions, the stories in its pages succeed admirably in honoring—and emulating—Ray Bradbury's fifty years' worth of classic science fiction.

Bradbury may be unique among SF writers in his uncanny ability to write stories that are both demonstrably science fiction (or fantasy, as the case may be), and at the same time possess an aura of "Americana," a homespun immediacy that bypasses genre boundaries and reaches directly into a reader's subconscious. Given a chance to play with the Bradbury style (and in many cases,

with Bradbury characters or settings), most of the anthology's contributors acquit themselves quite well.

I can't point to any one story and call it the book's best—Nolan and Greenberg have designed the collection so that the stories complement each other rather than inviting comparison. There are a few standouts, though: "The Inheritance" by Bruce Francis takes a Bradbury story of sunlight and dreams and spins a haunting, gripping sequel; Robert Sheekley applies a bit of his own wicked humor in a clever response to *The Martian Chronicles*; "A Lake of Summer" by Chad Oliver has the Bradbury eye for the magic of adolescence; and Charles Beaumont's "Something in the Earth" captures the flavor of Bradbury as social commentator.

Only two of the twenty-two stories really miss the mark. Horror novelist J. N. Williamson tries to juggle too many balls at once in a story that brings several disparate Bradbury characters together, while John MacLay's attempt at a single-character vignette simply seems superfluous and abrupt. But these are brief anomalies, and are easily overshadowed by the rest of the collection.

The book as a whole is remarkably comprehensive, with tales taking off from most of Bradbury's major works. Nolan provides knowledgeable, readable story-notes and a solid introduction. There's a brief commentary from Isaac Asimov. And Bradbury himself gets both the first and the last word, leading off the fiction with an unpublished tale about a troll, a bridge, and a psychiatrist, and finishing up the volume with a pleasant retrospective essay.

This is, of course, an essential purchase for the serious collector of Ray Bradbury material. But it's also an anthology of first-rate fiction that can be thoroughly enjoyed on its own merits, as well as a rare look backward at a whole class of SF that has mostly faded from existence. Buy it for its sense of history, its sense of literature, or for plain old good reading—and prepare to be well satisfied on all three counts. — *J. Bunnell* ♦

The Young Person's Guide to the Organism

(Variations and Fugue on a Classical Theme)

James Alan Gardner

Theme: Organism

Allegro maestoso e largamente
(With good speed, majestic
and sweeping)

A treat. Come to the window.
An Organism is passing the
Outpost.

There, where my claw
points. It is very faint. It is
nearly invisible because its
skin absorbs almost all the
electromagnetic radiation it re-
ceives. Do you know what I
mean by electromagnetic radi-
ation? And what else besides
light? And what else? And what
else? Gamma rays, child. Gam-
ma rays.

When you sleep tonight, I
will see that you dream of
physics.

You cannot tell from this
view, but the Organism is very
large. Twelve kilometers long,
ten kilometers in diameter at
its midsection. That is compa-
rable to the Outpost itself. It is
larger than any ship or orbital
yet constructed by your race.

If you look closely, you will
see that from time to time its



Illustration by Tom Lunzer

skin glistens slightly with thin ghosts of color. It is beautiful, is it not? A thing of splendor, though it is nearly invisible. It is black, but comely.

Can you identify my allusion? The Song of Solomon. From a human celebration text. I have made a study of such texts, child; they hearten me. Whenever I despair that your race is entirely consumed with pettiness, the celebrations remind me that humans also recognize greatness.

Recognize the greatness of this Organism, child. It is magnificent: huge, ancient, serene. When such an Organism passes by, ephemeral species like ours will dream dreams and see visions. Its presence stirs a resonance within us; some races claim these creatures are the shadows of gods, slowly gliding through our universe.

We do not know where this Organism comes from. It has been in deep space for centuries. If it does not stop in Sol's system, it will travel many more centuries before it reaches another star. It has been alone a long time.

No . . . why should we stop it? We have no right to interfere. Once it is past the Outpost, it is within human jurisdiction.

I don't understand your question. Why should it matter whether the humans can "handle" the Organism? This is their system—they are its children and its masters. We will not tamper with human affairs, not even "for their own good." We have neither the right nor the wisdom to meddle. You know that.

Yes, you are human yourself, child, but only in the coils of your DNA. In your brain and heart and soul, you are the chosen envoy of the League of Peoples. By the time humans step beyond the edge of their system, you will be ready to serve as intermediary between our two races. But before you can act, you must learn; and in order to learn, you must observe.

Observe the Organism as it passes, child. We do not know where it came from, nor can we predict where it goes. We cannot tell how much it is moved by instinct, how much by intellect . . . yet I say unto you, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these.

Yes, another allusion. And unfair to Solomon. I expect he was a marvel himself.

Variation A: Leviathan

Presto

(Very quickly)

Contact: May 2038

Not so long ago, my darling girl, every freighter flying the Red Run had one cargo pod doing duty as an Environment. You wouldn't know what that was, would you? (Whoops, Granddah spilled a bit on your bib, didn't he? Let me wipe it off. Ahh, get your fingers out of it. It's the tiniest fingers in the world you have, yes Colleen, yes you do.)

An Environment was a piece of Earth, that's what it was. A si-mu-la-tion. Which is a big word even for those

of us who've mastered words like Mama and Dada and Granddah. (Granddah. Grannnn-daaaahhh. No? Oh, well.)

We sometimes had trouble with Mudsides investors who thought the Environment was a waste of our freight space, but those damned money-lenders all had their thumbs up their . . . they were notorious short-sighted, that's what they were. You put yourself in the place of those miners up on Mars. Which would you rather have? Another few tons of bouillon and toothpaste? Or a walk through a rose garden smelling of perfume and peat moss, maybe a night forest rustling with rabbits and squirrels, or a marsh with redwing blackbirds fluting away Cheeee-ri-ohhhhh! (Oh, you like that? Cheeee-ri-ohhhhh! Cheeee-ri-oh-oo-oh!)

Anyway, how it was, your ship *was* its Environment. (Take a big mouthful, that's my girl.) The Environment was your ship's trademark and you lived up to it. I remember a Japanese ship called the *Edo Maru*—had a pretty little Shinto shrine, copy of a famous one on Mt. Fuji, I forget the temple's name. But very pleasant and tranquil. Trouble was, the captain was this Swede, nice fellow really, but *bearty*, you know, with the loudest voice God ever foisted on someone who didn't sing opera. Sort of gave the ship a split personality. No one could take it serious.

Don't know whatever happened to the *Edo*. Got old, got sold, I guess. Not many alternatives to that story, are there?

Our ship was called the *Peregrine*, and our Environment was the deck of a China clipper. A bit different from the back-to-nature Environments, but very popular. We had sun, waves, gulls, fresh-picked oolong in the hold. The kids could climb up into the rigging. Adults too, for that matter—miners would get one whiff of the breeze carrying the salt smell of the Pacific and they'd be clambering up the mast, forgetting the mines and the cold red desert, stretching those muscles that only get stretched when body and soul reach up together.

Once every docking, we'd run a storm—never broadcast when it would be, just let the sky start to turn grey . . . and the excitement! The looks on the faces of the visitors when the clouds began to cover the sun and folks knew they'd hit the right time! Then a lightning flash in the distance, a count of five, the rumble of thunder . . . waves heaping up and capping over, the wind rising to squall, the deck rocking, our crew lashing everyone to the railings as rollers came crashing over the bough . . . well, we were a legend. *Peregrine* wasn't a clunk of a freighter looking like a sow dangling twenty full teats, but an honest-to-God clipper ship.

Not an easy image to maintain, I tell you. Like the old masted clipper *White Cloud*, we couldn't ever be late, or the mystique would be shattered. Other ships—*Coven-try*, that was the one with the rose garden—*Coventry* never docked on schedule. Once we saw it parked behind Phobos, passing time till it was overdue. It had its reputation, we had ours.

All of which is preamble to the story I'm going to tell you, soon as you have another spoonful of these beans. Or peas. This green sludge that looks like it came out of

some . . . out of the wrong end of a herbivore. Mmmmm, yes, it's good, isn't it?

We may have had some beans and peas on board for the run I'm going to tell about. I don't know. The manifests said we were carrying perishables, which meant they'd only be good for three or four months in a refrigeration pod. The contract called for docking at Mars-Wheel within ninety days of departure, with a late penalty of ten per cent of total fees per day . . . which was tough terms, let me tell you. But we were the *Peregrine* and we had our reputation to uphold. Not to mention raking in a pretty packet if we pulled the trick off.

We ran stripped, without a thimble more fuel than we needed and without a single spare part. Normally, we'd carry enough gear to rebuild the entire engine if need be, not to mention duplicate navigation and life-support systems. But that meant extra mass, and to make the Red Run in ninety days, given the relative positions of the Earth and Mars at that point . . . well, you don't want to hear this. Anyway, I don't want to talk about it, which amounts to the same thing, don't it?

We had run stripped twice before, and we didn't like it any better the third time. Superstitious types in the mess—and there are always superstitious types in the mess, that's sure as death and taxes—they said you couldn't get away lucky three times in a row. All of us were jumpy, and me . . . it was my last trip before retirement, and I thought sure the fates would cut me down. Passing a watch alone in the control room, I'd say to myself, O'Neil, didn't you just hear the whine of the engines change? Shouldn't the pitch of the turbines sound lower? And isn't there maybe a kind of sour smell in the air, not exactly like something burning, but maybe the tiniest leak in a liquid fuel canister . . . and I'd stare at all the gauges, tap them sharp in case the needles were stuck, run diagnostics over and over again wondering what I'd do if I actually found something wrong, when all along, I knew the answer was just bend over and kiss my . . . life good-bye.

So. It was the sixty-fifth day and I was the only one awake on the ship. Well, considering how badly we were all sleeping that's probably not true, but I was the only crewmember on duty, sitting in the control room and fretting over imagined catastrophes. I thought I was so keyed up that I'd leap at shadows; but suddenly, it dawned on me I'd been staring at a blip on the proximity screen for about a minute without realizing what that blip meant.

I jerked into action, grabbed a radio headset with shaking hands, and nearly shouted into the mouthpiece, "Attention nearby vessel, this is merchant freighter *Peregrine* traveling stripped, repeat stripped, en route to Mars-Wheel. Please yield. Repeat, please yield. Over." Which meant that I wanted the other vessel to do whatever maneuvering was needed to avoid collision, because we intended to keep dead on course.

There was a silence which felt long, but I wasn't near calm enough to wait more than a heartbeat. I repeated myself three times without getting an answer, all the while watching the blip. It seemed to be growing, a

speck that grew like a grain of rice in water and kept growing, to maggot, to beetle, to moth; but faint, ghostly faint, as if it was barely there. Too big for another freighter, but nothing like an asteroid, nothing like any chunk of space debris I'd ever seen. My hand hovered over the klaxon button, ready to send a panic through the ship, but I was too scared and unsure to sound the alarm. I doubted what I saw. I kept saying under my breath, I'm dreaming, I've snapped, it can't be.

It took a long time for the object to show on the visual monitors. When it did, it was a huge egg, bigger than Mars-Wheel itself, but so black I could only see it as a blot lumbering across the starscape. It was the biggest damned ship eyes ever saw, and I knew it hadn't been constructed by human hands.

We passed within ten clicks of it, and I did nothing but watch. Never turned on the video recorders. Never called another soul as witness. I don't know why. After the edge dulled on my terror, I was overall calm. I didn't want to share this thing. It was something like a miracle, and I saw it as a promise that the run would end all right. Ah, my darling, I was the man in the clipper's crow's-nest catching sight of Leviathan itself in the quiet dark, and taking comfort that there are great and strange mysteries in the places between shores. The deeps are unfathomable, which is a pun and a promise and a treasure and a truth. Near ten years have passed, but the wonder's still in me. And maybe it'll rub off on you, Colleen, my other wonder. Yes. Yes.

Now we'll mop off this pretty little mouth and say all gone, get rid of the nice bib that Granddadh messed up, and then we'll see if we can find where that mother of yours hides the diapers. All right? All right.

Variation B: Nessie

Lento
(Slowly)

Contact: July 2038

My Dear Grandchild Ashworth,

The doctors tell me I shall not live to see you born; and although a sensible man puts as much faith in doctors as he does in palm-readers and politicians, I am inclined to believe them in this particular matter. When I lie awake at night, I can feel the loosening of the strings that tie me to life. They unravel quietly; I have yet to decide if death is being gentle or merely stealthy.

But to the business at hand. Have you read those stories where someone puts a message in a bottle and throws it into the sea? As a boy, I loved those tales. We lived a hundred miles from the coast and had no money for traveling; but one autumn day when I was ten, I tucked an old wine bottle into my knapsack and thumbed a ride with a van heading toward the ocean.

Two hours later I was standing on the edge of a deserted beach where a long cement pier stretched over the water. It was overcast and cold—I hadn't thought to bring

a sweater—but my blood was singing with exhilaration. I ran along the sand and danced with the waves, each breaker different, each filled with water from a distant shore. It was one of the two perfect moments in my life.

When I had burned off the hottest fires of my elation, I threw myself down at the end of the pier and watched flotsam nudge against the pylons below me. After a while, I got out my bottle, my pen, and a notepad, and tried to decide what to write for my note. You may laugh at me (I do myself now and then), but I'd given no thought to this aspect of the adventure. The important thing, you see, was just to send some tiny bit of myself off into the unknown . . . to think that my bottle might be retrieved by a pearl diver off Honshu, or tangle itself in a mackerel net on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, or founder in a storm rounding the Cape of Good Hope. I could point to any spot on the globe and think, there, right there, a part of me could be there.

Know what I finally wrote? HA HA. IT'S ME. HELLO!!!

I didn't even sign my name. In the back of my mind, I worried that someone might find the bottle, track me down, and say, "Well, boy, your bottle got all the way to Brazil, isn't that splendid?" But it wouldn't be splendid at all. It would collapse my dream to some tiny reality. I wanted the world, not one paltry patch of sand.

Years later, I found myself owner and master of the good ship *Coventry*, a merchant freighter plying the silent dark between Earth and Mars with cargoes of tea and silk and spice . . . not to mention toothpicks, pencils, toilet tissue, and other mundane needs of life. It was a staid and genteel existence: months of slow calm followed by a cheerful arrival at the colony, where everyone was your friend and happy to meet you. The *Coventry* was always eagerly awaited.

Like most lives, I suppose, my life rolled along uneventfully. Our contracts were unashamedly pedestrian—I left to others the dangerous chemicals, the refined fissionables, the lucrative perishables. Other ships might save money by gambling that an aging guidance system would last one more run; but the owners of those ships didn't ride in them. We spent more money on maintenance than we had to, but we never found ourselves stopped in the middle of a million miles of emptiness.

Except once. And that was by my command.

Halfway through an unexceptional run, I was summoned to the bridge by our second mate, a mercurial sort of woman named Rachel who amused the wardroom by taking up a new hobby on every run: oil painting, algebraic topology, playing the oboe . . . something different each time. This particular trip, she'd been dabbling with some of the new long-range sensor equipment that was just then coming onto the market (Lord knows where she got the money to buy it) and she had detected a large anomaly some three hundred miles off our course. Did she have my permission to investigate? Well, certainly; our schedule was flexibility itself.

I can't say what we expected to find. Humanity was new enough to spacefaring that we constantly encountered oddities, most of them falling into the category of "yet another oddly pitted rock with a mildly unusual

chemical composition." However, when we finally closed on the anomaly, we discovered it was anything but mundane.

It was a giant: teardrop-shaped, black as the night it drifted through . . . all the grandeur and mystery of the universe made solid and riding silently before us. Like meeting the dear old Loch Ness monster—something that *ought* to exist, even if it's impossible.

Almost twenty years have passed and still I cannot decide if it was a ship or a single giant creature, if it was alive or dead. One thing I know: it was not some oddly pitted rock.

Rachel looked at it with something like terror in her eyes. She could not bring herself to speak.

"Dock by it," I said, without hesitation. "Tell the crew it's only a drill. I want this kept secret."

"Is it safe?" she asked.

"Do what I ask please, Rachel. Let's consider this an order, shall we?"

While she brought the ship about and matched velocities with the anomaly, I put on a vac/suit and found some chalk. I was in a state of burning excitement, fully alive for the second time in my life.

Yes, child. I went out the airlock, leapt through the void to the anomaly's flesh, and scrawled huge letters on its midnight scales: HA HA. IT'S ME. HELLO!!!

Now I, Gerald Ashworth, own the universe. That's how I feel. Perhaps the mystery will reach some far-off planet and start some new life cycle; perhaps it will fall into a sun or black hole; perhaps it will simply drift on until the great enfolding embrace of the cosmos reunites all matter and energy at the end of time. A little piece of me rides through the universe's depths, and makes them pregnant with possibility.

Only you and I know this secret. I was out of sight of the *Coventry* when I wrote the message; Rachel must have been curious, but didn't ask questions. I begged her to tell no one what we had seen, and she agreed.

So, you may ask, why am I telling this to an unborn grandchild when I've kept it secret from everyone else? Because you are a complete unknown. Maybe you'll be a great leader, an artist, or a scientist; maybe you'll be a modest factory worker; maybe you'll be a criminal, or a lunatic, or a doctor. A world of possibility.

I shall put this letter into an envelope, and leave it for you to open on your eighteenth birthday. I own the Earth and I own the universe. Through you, I can own the future.

HA HA. IT'S ME. HELLO!!!

Variation C: Angel

Furioso

(Furiously)

Contact: July 2038

I am in hell you are in hell this is hell we are all in hell. Amen.

Say amen.

Say it!

Your voice sounds young today, demon. What are you pretending to be this time?

Simon Esteban. A student. Psychology or theology? Never mind, that was a joke. I have a lot of psychology students visit me, Simon Esteban. You'd think I was the only madwoman on Mars.

Yes I know I'm on Mars and I know I'm in hell. Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself. I am large . . . I contain multitudes. My name is Legion, for many demons have entered me.

[That's in the gospels. "Gospel" means "good news."

My other name is Rachel. "Rachel" means "Gentle innocent."

I enjoy irony as much as the next person.

I'm not what you expected, am I, Simon Esteban? Different from text books, different from case studies, different from typical profiles.

I can't imagine that you'll ask any of the right questions. You'll start on my childhood, toilet-training, who fucked me first, and all that sewage. Do you want to know why I blinded myself? Do you want to know why I dug fishhooks into my eyes and *pulled* with all my strength, yes picture that, Simon Esteban, you with your eyes whole and round, picture the sight of the points hovering a hair's-breadth away, the clean dividing line between past and future as the points touch the corneas, the moment of resistance from the lens, then dig, pull, shred, so fast and strong that the pain can't stop you soon enough, and the little sucking slurping *pop* as it is all over and sight gushes out in a flood . . . do you want to know why I did it? Because Oedipus did. The *real* Oedipus: not your puerile Freudian infant mooning over his mommy and playing with his pee-pee, but the King of Thebes, the hero who answered the Sphinx, the man who faced what he had done and knew he had to cleanse himself regardless of the cost.

When you're dirty, you must cleanse yourself, Simon Esteban. Or else you go mad.

Haven't they told you the story? Or are you simply lying in the hope that I'll reveal myself?

I killed an Angel.

Rachel, Gentle Innocent, was sent an Angel in the darkness of the deepest night, and she slew it in cowardice, out of fear and envy and hatred.

I won't tell you what it looked like. That's a secret God wants me to keep. God won't always hate me. Some day, I'll cleanse myself totally. You can't watch me forever. Only the Angels watch forever.

In the darkness of space, the Angel first appeared unto me and me alone, in all its beauty and mystery. But when I saw it, I was sore afraid. I feared its strangeness and faltered.

Another went forth to greet it, and walked with it, and talked with it, and when he returned his face shone and his countenance was transformed. Then in my heart I hated the Angel, for I had feared it and had not taken its hand. And I envied he who had touched its being and basked in its glory; him also did I hate.

Then did we leave the Angel and travel on to safe harbor, where I fled unto the Legions of Caesar; and there did I tell them of the Angel and where it could be found. I told them also lies, that it had hidden in dark ambush and attacked our ship with fierce beams of light that bid fair to destroy us. Then Caesar sent out ships of war to do battle with the Angel and destroy it. And from that day to this, the Angel has never been seen again.

Only after the Angel's destruction did I see what I had done. And seeing what I had done after seeing what I saw, I wished that I could no longer see. And so it was done.

Amen.

Say amen.

You don't know what to believe, do you, Simon Esteban? Is it a lie or delusion or metaphor or truth? Lie, delusion, metaphor, truth, metaphor, delusion, lie, back and forth, up and down, doh, mi, so, doh, so, mi, doh, the hateful arpeggio, lie, delusion, metaphor, truth, metaphor, delusion, lie.

I can't tell them apart anymore. That means I'm mad.

When I talk, no one else can tell them apart either.

I don't know what that means.

Variation D: Bogey

Allegro alla marcia

(Quick march tempo)

Contact: November 2038

I know it's easy to hate the military. . . .

Jenny, would you look at me?

Would you look at me, please?

No, I won't go away. Your father was my best friend and he would have wanted me to explain why he died. Frankly, your feelings don't enter into it at all.

Yes, I suppose that is a typical military attitude.

Let me say this: I'm about to tell you a military secret. If someone finds out, I'll be imprisoned for life. Maybe even executed. And I'm going to tell you anyway, even though you hate my guts and might turn me in when I'm finished. I'll do what needs doing, without balking at the consequences or deluding myself that it will be appreciated. And *that's* a typical military attitude too.

A second mate on a Mars-Earth freighter came to us and reported that her ship had been subjected to laser fire from a non-Terran-attributable source. Of course, we were skeptical—she was a high-strung, frantic sort of woman, and obviously close to some kind of breakdown. The question was, had she seen a bogey because she was unstable, or was she unstable because she had seen a bogey?

We questioned the rest of the crew. They told us the woman performed unscheduled maneuvers at one point in the journey, claiming they were some sort of drill. When we questioned the captain about this so-called drill, his evasiveness suggested that he was concealing some pertinent information. Regrettably, he was a for-

eign national and his ship had foreign registry, so we had no legitimate way to lever further data from him.

You're determined to hate us, aren't you, Jenny? To be honest, we tried to get him drunk. It didn't work. That was the limit of our unorthodox coercion methods.

After due deliberation, we decided to send a frigate to investigate, under the command of Captain John Harrison. Your father. He volunteered for the mission. I was in charge of ground communication on Mars.

We'd gone on wild goose chases before; sailors were forever seeing strange-shaped asteroids and reporting alien invasion fleets. We expected this to be another false alarm. However, as per standing orders, the operation was conducted under the tightest secrecy.

Our informant had given us detailed information on the bogey's course; if it was there, we'd find it. To our surprise, we did.

I won't tell you what it looked like. Suffice it to say, it was larger than Mars-Wheel and Venus-Wheel combined. It was virtually invisible on all spectral bands; if the informant hadn't told us exactly where to look, we wouldn't have found it. In comparison, the vessel your father commanded glowed like a beacon. The bogey must have detected the frigate clearly, but took no hostile action.

After tracking the bogey for several hours, your father attempted communication using everything from radio to signal flashers. There was no response of any kind.

We consulted with higher authority. The very highest. Everyone was inclined to leave the bogey alone . . . or more accurately, to turn responsibility over to the scientific arm and let them investigate to their hearts' content. But we had that report that the bogey had fired on a freighter, and trajectory calculations showed the thing was heading into the main shipping lanes on a near-collision course with Earth.

Do you understand how it was, Jenny? It was heading for Earth and no one knew why. We didn't know if it was an invasion army, or a bomb, or just some harmless piece of junk. We didn't know.

Yes, the decision was made to destroy it. I didn't make it, your father didn't make it, but we agreed one hundred per cent.

You say that as if we were all vicious killers. You knew your father; you know he wasn't like that. He was the man on the spot, that's all. He had to carry out the mission.

Do you think no one considered the alternatives? Yes, the bogey might have been peaceful. Yes, it might have blessed humanity in unimaginable ways. Yes, it might simply have drifted past in total indifference. Believe me, our superiors didn't make the decision casually.

But they had no choice. The bogey would pass through the space lanes. It would be seen. It would be a destabilizing influence. There would be panic, hysteria, people killed in riots . . . and that's if the bogey just flew by without taking action. Maybe it would turn out to be hostile after all. We had to face that possibility. What would humanity think of the fleet if we let such a thing reach Earth without opposition?

I want you to understand this, Jenny. Your father would want you to understand. No one could take that chance. We had to do the hard thing. The hard thing is not killing or dying, it's making the choice. Making the choice that is cruel and necessary and irrevocable.

Perhaps the hardest thing is when you know you'll never find out if you were right.

The bogey drank up laser fire like water—your father drained his weapon batteries without burning a square inch of the thing's skin. Contrary to insinuations from the press, our forces *are* respecting the Selene treaty, and your father had no nuclear weapons aboard. Therefore, after consultation with our superior officers and in full agreement with their decision, your father commanded his men to evacuate the vessel in life-pods, and then, alone at the helm, rammed the bogey at maximum velocity.

We don't know if the bogey was destroyed. Perhaps it was only diverted from its course. Other ships searched the area, but space is large. They found less than a third of the remains from your father's ship. They found nothing at all of the bogey.

To me, Jenny, your father died a hero. Not because he was willing to die—there are millions of fools who think that dying somehow justifies their cause. Believe me, that's bullshit: your father knew that dying doesn't prove anything. But he died anyway, eyes open, full of doubt but doing the job.

They told you that your father died in some kind of accident. I thought you should know the truth. Too many things happen by accident in the world. It's time people realized that some things happen by human choice.

Variation E: Daemon

Brillante

(Sparkling, lively)

Contact: November 2038

Sit down and quit whining.

I don't care if you *were* going riding. I've decided it's time to pontificate.

Honestly, Maria, didn't they teach you anything in that private school I sent you to? Pontificate. Look it up. Show a little initiative, for God's sake.

That's what I want to talk about: initiative. There are two types of people in the world—the ones who are alive and the ones who aren't. The quick and the dead. The open and the closed.

Here. Catch.

Know what that is?

A false fingernail? Did you say a false fingernail? Hell, that false fingernail is the Petrozowski Whole Spectrum Collector Cell. That's what pays for your wardrobe, your boyfriends, and your goddamned horse.

Sometimes, Maria, I don't think you're really my daughter. Sometimes I think your mother, God rest her

soul, had a fling with some pretty playboy while I was busy at the office. No, I know, she wasn't that kind of a woman. I'm just trying to dodge the blame.

Now, here . . . take a look at this.

No, it's not the same thing. That, my dear, is a scale from the hide of my personal daemon.

Daemon, not demon! My guardian spirit. My source of inspiration.

No, your old man isn't cracking up. Although people might think so, if they knew what I'm about to do.

I'm going to give you total control over Petrozowski Energy. Have fun with it.

Stop whining. Stop right now.

The business world is losing its novelty for me. I foresee that in the not too distant future, I'll be bored frantic. So I'm taking a one-man yacht into space and I'm going to find the daemon again.

I've thought about this a long time. I could go through the motions of running the company till the day I die, or I could say to hell with the rat race and pursue another dream.

I hate the jaded way I feel some days, Maria. I want to be excited about something again. I want to feel the tingle of magic.

You don't know what I'm talking about, do you?

Thirty-five years ago, daughter dear, I was a lowly navy tech babysitting the solar energy cells of a frigate named the *Coherent*. It was a stupid job. I'd enlisted because I wanted to get off Earth. "Out of the cradle and into the rest of the universe," that's what the recruiters told me. I should have realized the purpose of the fleet wasn't to widen our horizons but to bring the cosmos down to our size.

One afternoon, I was standing my watch when I felt the jolt of our guns firing and saw our battery levels dropping. Fifteen minutes later, the charge in the batteries red-lined dead bottom. An hour later, we were ordered to abandon ship. That was it. No one felt it necessary to explain what was going on. Need-to-know, and all that.

I ejected in the nearest escape pod and found myself shooting toward the biggest damned hulk I'd ever seen. I couldn't tell you what it was. I've thought about it most of my life.

In my dreams, sometimes I get inside the thing, and it's always different. Sometimes I meet these glowing little men who sit me down and tell me things that make me understand myself and the universe. Sometimes it's filled with monsters and I find myself with pistol in one hand and saber in the other, shooting and slashing to save the human race. Sometimes I'm just walking through this huge cavity and I look up and there's this huge heart beating slowly overhead, booming like thunder.

But I didn't get inside the daemon; I only smacked into its hide. A rough landing . . . the daemon had a gravity almost as strong as Earth's and it sucked me right down. I can't explain the gravity—artificial maybe. I managed to brake most of my speed with the retros, but the escape pod still slammed against the daemon with a clang like a great Chinese gong. *CLLAAANNNGGGG!!!*

I did that to catch your attention. Here and now, girl! Keep your head in the here and now!

The first thing I did after landing was put on a suit and go out—I wanted to know what I'd landed on. The surface was broad and black, very slightly rounded and pebbly with scales. Overhead floated the *Coherent*, bright and silver like the moon above dark autumn fields.

I knelt and examined the daemon's hide. Blacker than black, each scale was angled toward the *Coherent*, an audience of a billion eyes watching.

Then, slowly, the nearest eyes turned to look at me.

If I hadn't been a solar-cell technician, I might have run screaming in terror back to the pod . . . but I'd worked among our own solar collectors and seen them slowly turn their gaze on me as the robot controllers picked up my body heat and swiveled to drink it in.

I pried loose as many of those little eyes as I could. They had to be energy collector cells and for some reason, I knew—knew!—that they were orders of magnitude more efficient than anything we humans had developed. And indeed they were, my darling daughter, indeed they were.

Perhaps if I'd had more time, I could have found some way to enter the daemon . . . but as I knelt there plucking up eyes, I saw some of them turn away from me and I glanced back to see what they had noticed.

The *Coherent*, engines streaming out a fiery cloud, was speeding through the night like a torpedo on a collision course with my daemon. I suppose that in the back of my mind, I must have realized this would happen—why else would they have ordered us to abandon ship? But for a moment, I was staggered and frozen by the utter stupidity of the military mind. It was the ultimate evil: trying to kill something wonderful and magic and new.

I was paralyzed for only a moment, but it was almost too long. I barely had time to get inside the pod and slam the outer hatch before the *Coherent* hit and exploded. The daemon pitched wildly; my pod was bucked off, rolling end over end and tossing me around inside like a man going over Niagara Falls in a barrel.

Through the pod's viewport, I caught one last glimpse of the daemon before it vanished into the blackness. It was on a new heading . . . I don't know if it had simply been knocked off course by the collision or if it had changed direction on its own. I couldn't tell if it had been damaged; it vanished as quickly as a coin in the hands of a magician.

Well, you can fill in the rest of the story. I kept the scales to myself until I got out of the navy, then analyzed them and reproduced them as well as I could. The reproduction wasn't perfect, but it was generations ahead of anything else on the market; and as the money flowed in, I could afford to hire a team of the best eggheads, and patent by patent, they came closer to a full duplication of . . . well, a flake of my daemon's skin.

I could also afford to hire scouts to search for the daemon. They never found it. I think . . . I think that daemons only appear to a certain kind of person. You have to be ready for them. You have to be open. You have to be goddamned alive.

So. I'm going out solo.

I want to know if I'm still the sort of person who's worthy of wonder.

Don't cry. If you don't want to run the company, let the Board of Directors do it. You'll still receive dividend payments and the company will stay healthy. My people know what they're doing. I just thought you might enjoy honest work.

If you prefer, you can sell the company and use the money to pursue whatever dreams you want. Really. I wholeheartedly approve of people who pursue their dreams.

If you have any dreams.

Do you have any dreams, Maria?

Variation F: Boojum

Meno mosso

(Slower, less motion)

Contact: July 2070–April 2071

So, Yorgi. You got caught.

You're an idiot, boy.

Your mother, she wants me to make a big fuss. She wants me to smack you around. I should spit in your face and say your ancestors will haunt you.

Maybe they will.

Me, if I get to heaven, and some great-great-grand-child of mine gets caught breaking into a store, I got better things to do than sneak up on the kid and go boo. I'll just say to myself, the boy's an idiot, and go back to the hours.

But your mother says, Emil, talk to the boy. Okay, Yorgi, I'm talking to you.

The priests, they'll threaten you with hell. They're good at it; it's their job. But you're like me—you can't listen to a sermon without falling asleep.

So, no sermons. Here's all I'm going to say: there are lots of things you can do in your life, but they break into two classes. Some things make you smarter. Some things make you stupider. No other possibilities.

Stealing makes you stupider. Every time you steal, you get a little stupider. It doesn't matter if you get caught, and it doesn't matter what you steal.

I know.

A few years back—you *aren't* going to tell your mother this story—I was working for Petrozowski Energy. Cook on a freighter. But it wasn't really a freighter, it was a hunter. We would load up with cargo and fuel as if we were making the Red Run, but then we would prowl space, looking for a boojum that Mr. Petrozowski saw once. Crazy, eh? And the craziest thing was, our third time out, we found it.

Big thing. Huge. And black, with a kind of shimmer, like the Northern Lights. First time we saw it, we nearly pissed ourselves. Whole crew went up to the bridge, looked at the thing. None of us had a clue what it was. Didn't look dangerous. Just kind of spooky.

Instructions were to track it, plot its course. No radio reports . . . Mr. Petrozowski didn't want anyone finding out where we were or what we were doing. Once we got the thing charted, we were supposed to fire back full thrust and report in person.

Well. We all got to thinking. Petrozowski was paying big money for all this secrecy. Triple what we'd get on a normal run. And if we reported home right away, maybe we'd get a bonus if we were lucky, but then we'd go back to the usual grind. We thought, if we put off reporting it till the *next* run . . . well, Mr. Petrozowski would still find his boojum, we'd still get the bonus, and we'd get triple pay for an extra run.

So that's how we all started getting stupider. It was stealing, you see. Easy stealing. Didn't have to hit someone over the head, didn't have to get past an alarm. Just waited out our time and headed home empty-handed.

We waited out our time on the boojum. Didn't have anywhere else to go.

Went down, looked around. It was scaly. No mouth on it, or any other opening. Something had dented its side a bit . . . meteor, I guess. We tried to cut a hole in it with laser torches, but the light just got sucked up. We pried away scales, and underneath were more scales. We went down a long way, but the scales went down farther. They grew back too, eventually. Took a few days. They sort of pushed up from below.

That first time, we amused ourselves watching the boojum grow scales. Some of the technicians tried to figure out where its gravity came from, but they soon lost interest.

The second time, we found it again, no problem. Went straight to it. Then we had nothing to do but spend three months sitting around. As cook, I was the busiest hand on board.

To pass the time, the crew played with the Environment. Sure, Yorgi, our ship carried an Environment, like any other Mars freighter—Mr. Petrozowski didn't want to arouse suspicions when the ship was in port. The Environment held a little stone temple surrounded by a lot of delicate green plants . . . very pretty. Buddhist, maybe. Mr. Petrozowski didn't care about it—it'd been built by previous owners. We could use it for anything we wanted.

We installed it on the boojum.

For some reason, we laughed and laughed at the idea. It seemed so funny. This boojum, this strange alien thing, this giant—we would attach our Environment to it like a flea on the back of a dog, and we would ride and grow fat. The ship would hover in space, but the crew would pass the time in the Environment pod on the boojum's back, sitting in easy chairs under a simulated sun, sipping lemonade and playing cards. Like we were all wealthy landlords who had found some private jungle retreat away from the silly peasants.

That time, we had to feed the Environment power from the ship's storage cells. And we had to reattach the Environment when we left for home.

The next time, we sold our extra fuel on the black market. We didn't need fuel to go out into space and sit around for three months. We used the money to buy

good Petrozowski Whole Spectrum Collector Cells, which we installed on the hull of the Environment pod so it could gather its own energy from the sun. That way we didn't have to go back to the ship to recharge the life support systems; we could live in the Environment all the time. And we did. We lived what we thought were the lives of the rich.

They were stupid lives.

The time came to head for Earth. And we found that the boojum had grown too fond of the Environment pod.

Somehow, the scales of the boojum had attached themselves to the collector cells we had installed on the pod. The scales and cells had grown together into a single skin, like the edges of a wound healing shut. The Environment was bonded fast; we couldn't cut it free, couldn't pull it loose with the ship's engines. In the end, we had to go home without it.

Stupid, you see? We thought we could do what we wanted. We thought we were smarter than other people, and what did we get?

When we got back to Earth, we still thought we might get away with it. We thought to buy a new pod; we thought we could make do with a substitute, pick up better cutting tools and go back to slice the Environment free. No. Mr. Petrozowski heard we were missing a pod; he investigated and found we'd been selling our fuel—and he fired us. He thought we'd been cheating him all along. We told him we had found his boojum, but he laughed in our faces.

So. Your father is no saint. We both knew that, yes? But I have learned.

We were stupid. There were hundreds of ways we could have been caught. If one of Mr. Petrozowski's other hunters had found us on the boojum. If the police caught us selling fuel on the black market. If any member of the crew had loose lips. Hundreds of ways. But we ignored them. We thought we were being smart when we were being stupid.

I tell you, Yorgi, if you decided to be the best thief in the world, and learn, and work hard at it, maybe you could get smarter. Maybe that would be possible. But such thieves, I don't think they exist. When I was a thief, I was lazy. I sat on easy chairs and drank lemonade. I told myself Mr. Petrozowski was stupid, not me. I thought I was one of the smartest men in the world, and I laughed, laughed, laughed. But what was I? A flea riding the back of a dog. That's all.

Who thinks fleas are smart?

Variation G: Titan

Dolce con amore

(Sweetly, with love)

Contact: May 2071

Teeth brushed? Faces washed? No one has to pee? Then we starve.

How I met your father. A true story. With a moral.

No giggling. Once upon a time.

You know that there is great rivalry between the Venus cloud mining orbitals. Great rivalry. Each orbital is owned by a different company, and the companies hate each other. They sabotage each other's wells, they interfere with each other's communications, and when miners meet each other in Venus-Wheel . . . well, there may be fights and duels and death.

My family lived on an orbital belonging to Clearwater Chemical, and our greatest rivals were those in New Frontier Mining and Manufacture.

No giggling! This is a true story. With a moral.

My mother was Clearwater's economic envoy to Venus-Wheel. By the time I was fourteen, I went with her on every trading mission. In those days, I was a very great beauty. . . .

What are all these giggles I'm hearing?

I was a great girlish beauty then, and now I am a great womanly beauty, which is even better, though different. Do you want a story or not?

Then we go on. How I met your father. A true story. With a moral.

In those days, I was a great girlish beauty, and *firm* in the soft places. Which is almost as good as soft in the soft places, though different. Many boys wanted to make love to me, and many older men as well.

A *great* many older men.

You would not *believe* how many older men would rather have girlish beauty instead of womanly. "Bah," they say. "Who cares if the woman knows what to do? We know what to do, and that is the important thing."

This is a free lesson for you about men.

But I had not yet learned that lesson, and I was drunk with the power of my very great firm beauty. I went to many dances on Venus-Wheel and danced with many men. It was a great whirling excitement for a girl my age. The men worshipped me and the boys adored me; it made me very strong.

Then, one night, I met a boy who made me feel weak. Oh, such weakness! If I looked in his direction, I blushed. If I didn't look in his direction, I watched in mirrors to see if he was eyeing me behind my back. When he talked to me, I wanted to run and hide; when I danced with him, I could feel every part of my body singing. And I could feel every part of his body too—maybe not singing, but at least standing up in the choir.

When I told him my name was Juliet, he bowed and said he would be my Romeo. So gallant! But too close to the truth. I found out after the dance that his father was economic envoy for New Frontier. Disaster! I was forbidden to speak to the boy again.

I cannot be sure that I loved my Romeo before I was forbidden to see him; but afterwards, I loved him with a love as deep as starry space. He was the blazing sun, and I the dark Abyss that yawned to engulf him and be illuminated.

We talked like that back then. We were young.

We met all the time, of course. Many trysts. Many excellent trysts. I became a very great girlish beauty who purred to herself, and my mother became suspicious. She

announced that she was sending me home to Clearwater orbital, where the only boys were my brothers and cousins.

I did not go. Instead, I eloped. My Romeo and I stole a rich man's yacht, disabled the homing beacons, and fled into the night. Our goal was Mars, where we would sign up to scout the asteroid belt. Out in the belt, we would become the first humans to find alien artifacts; we would be rich and famous, and the entire solar system would envy us.

Two weeks later, our food ran out. A month and a half away from Earth, four months away from Mars.

My Romeo and I had our first fight.

"I thought *you* were going to pack the food."

"I didn't know we needed food. Ships are supposed to recycle everything."

"When you recycle everything, you don't recycle *everything*. You run out eventually. Don't you know Newton's laws?"

"I know Newton's laws, and they don't say anything about food!"

Remember, this is a true story.

We made up and made love, as always happens with first fights. Making love after a fight can be very bad or very good. It is awkward, but vigorous.

We were lucky and did not starve. God looked down, said "Tsk-tsk, such blockheads," and saved us.

We came upon a great creature in space. A giant; a friendly Titan, like Prometheus or Atlas.

Why do you immediately believe me when I say we found a Titan in space, and you giggle when I say I was a great girlish beauty? No, don't answer.

Like Atlas, the Titan carried a world on its back and inside that world, we found a temple for worshipping the Titan. The temple area was bright and warm, filled with growing green plants. Many of the plants were edible; some were edible even after we had overcome the first pangs of our ravening hunger.

We stayed at the temple for two weeks. At dawn, we would wake naked in each other's arms and watch the sun rise; we would eat breakfast, then spend the morning gathering leaves. In the afternoon, we would go back to the yacht and take turns shoving leaves down the toilet, to replenish the bio-mass that the ship needed to make food. In the evening, we would return to the temple, recite worshipful poems of our own devising, and sprawl ourselves reverently on the altar. We fell asleep only when we had wrung out our bodies in every way, and we dreamed of the new universes we would discover.

Here is what we really discovered.

I discovered my Romeo had never heard of Scarlatti, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Cage, or Laurier-Leyrac. He was not keen to learn.

I discovered he was an enthusiast for types of music called Synthereg and Mexihowl. Mexihowl required drumming on your thigh. Or someone else's thigh.

I discovered he thought my mother was a greedy old bitch because of some deal where she'd outmaneuvered New Frontier.

I discovered he was unwilling to admit that many New Frontier trade practices were unethical.

I discovered whisker-burn.

He discovered menstruation.

We flew back to Venus-Wheel and were met with teary hugs. Afterwards, our parents got very very angry, but hugs first. That is the way good parents are.

My Romeo and I were sent to apologize to the man whose yacht we had stolen. The man was wealthy and good-natured. It amused him, the way things turned out. He laughed and laughed when I told him about stuffing the leaves into the toilet. I laughed with him. We had a very good laugh, and my Romeo joined in with us. Then he went away with his family, leaving me alone with the wealthy man.

So the true story is, I met your father by stealing his yacht to run away with someone else. And the moral is, making love is glorious, and some day you will do it and revel in it, as your father and I do it and revel in it. But when you pick someone to be with, think about everything *except* making love.

Any two people can make love if they want to.

Variation H: Dragon

Scherzando ma con fuoco
(Playfully, but with fire)

Contact: July 2076

Sacred Daughter of the Sun,

Forgive an old woman's presumption for writing to You, Honored Child, and forgive the many tricks I have used to smuggle this message past Your Regents. The Regents are all fine people, yes, but they are not the Empress. Some things are meant for Your August Ears alone.

I am Mariko Haruki, wife to Yushio Haruki, who is chief executive of Laughing Dragon Entertainment Industries Company Limited. He is a dear man because he is mostly a child. He has invented many games in his life, not to mention many fine rides in Laughing Dragon Entertainment Parks throughout the Inner Planets; but I have never trusted him with the grocery money. Never mind. A good man, and good at building fun and happiness. Not so good at building strong fiscal structures. So—and I pray it will be forgotten by the time You reach Your Majority and are given this letter—my dear Yushio led Laughing Dragon to the brink of ruin.

One day, he phoned from work and asked me to make a large withdrawal from our savings account. Why? I asked. He needed the money to buy something. What did he want to buy? He wouldn't say. So I did what a good wife should: I gave him the money, then followed him when he left the office.

He bought a sword. A very fine sword of strong bright steel, with a hilt covered in real leather and a fine embroidered sheath. A good choice for hanging in the living room, but I knew he wanted it for a different reason. I confronted him there in the store, berated him about

what he was up to, attracted a big crowd, never mind. In the end, I let him make a down payment on the sword—it really was excellent, and the price quite reasonable—but I made him leave it in the store on layaway.

Still, that was not the end of it. He could see disaster looming for the company, and wanted to pay the honorable price of failure. Which meant he just wanted to run away. We women know that many men are just little boys whose swagger has become convincing.

Finally, I suggested flying into the sun. It was the kind of gesture that appealed to Yushio: a flamboyant idea, but austere in execution. It appealed to me too because the flight would give him time to reconsider his rash decision. I thought I could persuade him to start a new life on Mercury with the Flare-Fishers.

We set off secretly in the executive yacht, well-provisioned and weighted down with our life savings converted to platinum. (We had no children to whom we could leave an inheritance . . . my fallopian tubes had grown, I nearly died at fifteen, never mind.) Soon Yushio was treating our trip as an adventure. He had never been in space, though he had designed entertainments for all the colonies, and many spacefaring vessels. For hours at a time, he forgot himself and scribbled designs on paper: new games, new rides, new adventure areas. But then suddenly, he would remember the reason he was in space, the catastrophe facing his company, and he would sink into gloom.

Then the hand of the gods. Just outside the orbit of Venus, we encountered a dragon.

It didn't look like a dragon. More like a dragon's egg: black with shimmers, huge and beautiful. Silent and serene as space, but when you looked at it, you felt a million eyes looking back.

Almost everywhere, its hide was smooth as a girl's cheek; but in one spot, on its back, the skin rose in the shape of the sacred mountain (I do not lie) with a small hole at the top. Like the sacred mountain's cone.

Except that this opening was an airlock. Inside, there was fresh air, sunlight, gravity, and a reproduction of the Musubi Shrine to Amaterasu O-mikami, Your Own Celestial Ancestress.

I swear this is true.

"We have found Heaven," I said to Yushio.

"Nonsense," he answered. "We have found an Environment that Laughing Dragon built for a Mars freighter. The *Edo Maru*. I wonder what it's doing here."

"The gods put it here."

He looked around. "The gods haven't been taking very good care of it, have they?"

And it was true—the shrine was in a shambles. Vandalism had hacked off much of the foliage. Inside the gate, where Your Majesty knows there should only be peace and serenity, there were instead a few broken lawn chairs and some playing cards bearing pictures of hairy people in rut. And the altar . . . I cannot describe the altar, but it needed a very good cleaning.

I insisted on resanctifying the shrine. Yushio argued that it hadn't been a real shrine and that he shouldn't delay his incineration, but he knew he was on shaky

theological ground. How could his death be true to the way of *kami* when he would not trouble himself to repair the desecration of such a holy place?

Yushio is a dear man, but whenever he argues with me he is always wrong.

So we cleaned the shrine and put it to rights. Yushio had packed some incense with the intention of burning it as we sailed into the sun; but I convinced him that the gods would be happier if we used it at the shrine in a purification ceremony.

While we worked, we discussed what we thought this dragon really was. I knew in my heart that it was a true dragon sent by the gods . . . but I pretended to agree with Yushio that most likely, it was a secret super-project that had been abandoned for some reason. Maybe the builders had gone bankrupt and just left the thing here. (Going bankrupt was ever-present in Yushio's mind.)

Finally I said, "Why speculate? You know this once belonged to the *Edo Maru*. Radio your company and get them to find out who owns the Environment now."

Yushio refused. He said that his decision to die had cut all ties with the business world . . . but that just meant he was afraid to talk to people. Finally, I made the call myself after he had fallen asleep on rice wine. Our closest branch office was on Venus-Wheel, only a few radio-seconds away. They were glad to know we were still alive, worried that the creditors were growing more insistent every day. I cut short that line of conversation, saying, "I want to know who owns a freighter called the *Edo Maru*."

After a few minutes, the answer came back, "Petrozowski Energy."

"Yushio wants you to buy it."

"Buy it? I don't think we can afford . . ."

"Get a loan."

"I don't think any bank would . . ."

"Tell the banks," I said, "that Laughing Dragon is about to announce its largest entertainment park ever. Tell them we have kept it a great secret because it is a brand new idea. Tell them this park is where all the company's capital went, and it will repay everyone a millionfold. You hear?"

"Is this true?"

"Yes, it's all true. Very secret. Very big. In space."

"In space?"

"Yes, it's a whole new idea. You'll see. Get the Board of Directors. I'll turn on a tracking beacon so they can find us. They can come and see the marvel that Yushio has built. But you must buy the *Edo Maru*."

"Perhaps it would be possible . . ."

"And the *Edo Maru*'s Environment. And all attached chattels. That is most important. And it is most important that Petrozowski Energy does not think this is anything special. You hear?"

"Yes." And it was done. We purchased the *Edo Maru*, its Environment, and all attached chattels. The dragon was ours . . . if humans can claim to own such a beast.

When Yushio awoke, I was looking over his plans for new games and rides. "It would be a shame if these were never built," I said. He agreed.

By the time the Board of Directors arrived, Yushio had mapped out two thirds of the Laughing Dragon of Heaven Entertainment World: the Christian Heaven, where adults and children would be given their own wings to play bumpem; Allah's Heaven, with many nimble dancers; Valhalla, filled with carousing and axe-fights against hologram opponents; and many other fine heavens, including a reproduction of the real Heaven centered around the Musubi Shrine.

Now, as we begin construction on the park, the world believes this dragon was built by our company. They see what they expect to see: the foundation for the greatest entertainment site in the universe.

Only you, Great Empress, will know the truth. It is a truth that should remain secret for a thousand years, for if anyone suspected Heaven's real nature . . . well, we know the West has a long tradition of killing dragons. But You—You are Child of the Sun and Sister to Dragons. May the truth do You honor.

Variation I: Roc

Nobilmente con forza
(Nobly, with force)

Contact: September 2078

If this had happened in my grandfather's time, throats would already be cut. My grandfather was a prince who believed his title meant something. Perhaps it did in those days. Perhaps it still does. At the very least, being a prince means there is always some university somewhere that is willing to give you a scholarship. Trinity College, Oxford, for me. And you?

I don't believe I've heard of it. Good school, was it? Fine. I want to know we have a top man on this.

You're a little young to be a full partner, aren't you? Oh, no, I take that as a promising sign. Of course, you *will* be discussing the case with your senior partners? Good. Good.

Now, the long and the short of it is this: I want to sue Laughing Dragon's scaly tail off. Slap criminal negligence charges on anyone whose nose rises out of the foxhole. Permanently ruin a few careers, and if possible, give the whole Laughing Dragon of Heaven Entertainment Park such a reputation for gross mismanagement that no bourgeois little family would think of vacationing there. If we can drive a few of the bastards to *seppuku*, it will be icing on the cake.

Does that sound up your alley?

My dear man, let us understand each other. I am a prince in a line that stretches back more generations than anyone can count, and now, enemies have recklessly slain twenty-three people under my protection. If modern civilization prevents me from taking revenge with a knife in the night, I will use whatever other weapon comes to hand. I have chosen my weapon to be the courts, and I will use that weapon to shed blood for blood, ruin for ruin, life for life. If you stand with me, good. If not . . .

You want to hear the circumstances first? Well, that's fair. I approve. Only a barbarian kills without knowing why.

As I've said, being a full-blooded prince means little today. I've had to work for a living. All in all, I think that's good for a man. I direct a modest construction company. Our primary business is building orbitals, but we're happy to put up anything that requires work in vacuum. My crews are drawn from all corners of the Earth, and one was even born on Mars . . . but you understand, whether or not they are of the blood or the faith, they are *my* people.

We had contracted with Laughing Dragon to build a part of the amusement park they call Heaven. (I know you'll want to examine the contract; I'll leave a copy with you.) Our assignment was a section on the side of the park that is always turned away from the sun. The section was named *Afterlife After Dark* . . . it's a name that would make a sensible man ill, but a company that refuses to work for fools soon finds itself out of business. And to be honest, my workers found that building night clubs and carousels and roller coasters was a pleasant change from all those oh-so-functional orbitals.

Not that it was easy work. Far from it. The entire surface of Heaven—they seem to want to keep this secret, so splash it around in every interview you give—the entire surface is covered with Petrozowski Collector Cells. Incredible. How long has Petrozowski been in business? Ten years? I wouldn't have thought the entire production of all his plants could have made so many cells. Hundreds of hectares in area! And many layers deep . . . a stupefying achievement. But impossible to dig into. We had to pour concrete foundations on top, covering over a fortune's worth of the cells . . . and you can't imagine the technical difficulties of putting up small environment domes, so you can pour concrete foundations, so you can put up big environment domes. But never mind that now.

Our construction site was on the dark side, but we lived in dormitory pods on the bright side of the terminator. We worked in shifts, of course. Which is why I'm alive when twenty-three of my people are not.

It was about an hour before shift change and I was in our cafeteria having breakfast with the crew that would be going out. I planned on going out with them. I often did. And I always did whatever tasks the shift supervisor assigned me, even if I am a prince. A prince must set an example, don't you think?

Suddenly, in the middle of the meal, we felt a great trembling in the floor beneath us. Water glasses rattled; salt shakers fell over. Without a second's thought, every man and woman there kicked back chairs and ran to the equipment chamber where vac/suits were stored. We dove into the suits, grabbed extra oxygen tanks, jet packs, Mayday beacons, whatever we could fill our arms with; and then we piled into the airlocks in a rush to get out in the open.

Outside, we were just one of many construction crews evacuating their dormitories, stumbling about in confusion, trying to keep our footing on the quaking



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surface. Every band on my helmet radio was clogged with cries of panic. I tried to shout against the noise, but couldn't make myself heard. In exasperation, I clicked it off and searched the sky, hoping to see one of the supply ships docked close enough that a jet pack could bridge the gap. But instead I saw the cause of the disturbance.

The entire dark side of Heaven had split in two, as if we stood on a giant bird, a roc, that was unfolding its wings. The wings rose up higher and higher over the horizon, strong and graceful, the ebony of night now glittering in the sunlight; but as the wings moved, their speed and strength tossed off my workers like seeds scattered across a field. The night clubs, the carousels, the roller coasters . . . all wrenched apart as their foundations slid along with the motion of the wings. Gravity seemed to have gone wild out there: some buildings flew off into space with my people; others lodged themselves at the hinge point where the wings met the body.

Hundreds of people were thrown into the emptiness of the abyss. We formed rescue parties, retrieved those we could. Of my workers we found nineteen: seven alive, twelve dead in their suits. Another eleven have not yet been found. Teams still search—none of us believes that the missing are alive, but it's horrible to think of a friend's body drifting forever in blackness.

And the explanation for this all? It took fifteen hours to get anything out of Laughing Dragon. Then, the president's wife—his wife! the man couldn't face us himself—made a statement that the wings had been opened up to expose more collector cells to the sunlight. The management regretted that this had happened without warning. Notices were supposed to have been sent around but were inadvertently misplaced.

All a lie. I've paid a few bribes, and no one, inside or outside Laughing Dragon, knew what was going to happen. Anyway, why would they open the wings when it would cause such damage to their own park? No, someone made a mistake, someone very high up or very well protected, and that person must be made to pay.

Reasonable damages for the next of kin? Do you think my people weren't insured? The next of kin will be paid handsomely, and if the insurance company wants to reclaim its money from Laughing Dragon, it can file its own suit. *Damage*, man, not *damages*! Make them know they're dealing with something they can't control.

Variation J: Lion

Lamentoso ma dolcissimo
(Sadly, but very sweetly)

Contact: September 2078

Oh, my darlings! I wish it could be said that your father died a man.

My grandfather once said to me, "Boy, a man is not a man until he walks with a lion."

And my grandmother said, "Oh, William, that was long ago."

"No," he answered. "Long ago, it was said a man had to kill a lion. But guns made killing easy. Too many lions died. Now, no more killing. Walk with the lion. See him. Learn what a man is not. Hear the voice of that which is stronger than you."

"What nonsense," my grandmother muttered. "If the boy ever does meet a lion, he'll find running is better than walking."

But my grandfather looked me in the eye, and pointed a swollen-knuckled finger at my nose, and said softly, "A man is not a man until he walks with a lion. Maybe a leopard or a cheetah will do too. Or a male rhinoceros . . . but not a female! And elephants don't count either—they're strong, but now they're tame as dogs."

Thus, my grandfather. He died when I was still young . . . before I thought to ask if *he* had walked with a lion.

The only lions I have ever seen were mechanical. There's one back at the amusement park. On a merry-go-round. Ride a lion, ride a unicorn, ride a laughing dragon!

I bolted the lion in place myself. I pushed past the prince so I could do it with my own hands.

He probably thought I was trying to impress him with my enthusiasm. I think the truth was I was trying to impress the lion.

I'm getting cold. I wonder if I'll freeze before I suffocate or the other way around.

I could take off my helmet and finish it quickly. But there's always the chance that if I hang on, someone will find me before I die.

Besides, most of these helmets are designed to lock in place when there's no air pressure outside.

Can you hear my thoughts, children? Noliwe? Jobe? Mamina?

When my father died, I was asleep an ocean away. That night I dreamed of a great plain dotted with every kind of tree in the world. The air was full of the smell of lilacs, and the ground had a thick springy cover of pine needles and magnolia blossoms. If I reached up, I could pull down cherries or oranges, even calabashes—whatever fruit or nut I thought of, it was right there. Then my father was there too, and we walked together under the trees, saying nothing. I wanted to hold his hand the way I did when I was a boy, but I knew I couldn't.

"Son," he finally said to me, "they tell me I have to eat a leaf off every one of these trees. It's going to take a long while, and some of them are going to taste mighty bitter." He smiled. "Well, as penances go, I expected a lot worse. It's nice here, isn't it?"

"Did you ever walk with a lion?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "Lions are pretty scarce these days," he said. "You never know, though. Lots of places here where a lion could be hiding. I'll be checking them all out."

When I left him, he was still walking under the trees, slowly, enjoying himself. More relaxed in death than he had ever been in life.

I believe I really was talking to him.

Can you hear me, children? I don't know what time it is where you are. I hope you're dreaming.

Lately, I've had a recurring dream of standing on the deck of a tall ship on a still night sea. There are many people with me. I feel as if we've been becalmed a long time; but as I watch, wind fills our sails, the mast groans and the canvas snaps taut, and everybody is clambering up to the rigging, laughing, letting out the sails, starting to sing a song of great rejoicing that we'll soon be speeding towards our destination again.

Children . . . are you dreaming?

It's as quiet as a forest here. Soft static on my helmet radio, that's all. For a while, I could hear everybody shouting at each other back on Heaven, but I'm out of range now.

From where I drift, Heaven is eclipsing the sun. Behind Heaven, the sun's corona is wild with prominences.

Heaven has a fiery mane.

Why can't I stop thinking about lions? I could just as easily say I'm walking with the constellation Leo. If I knew which one it was.

No, I'm walking with Heaven. And Heaven is just a carousel lion: something someone built.

But it is beautiful. And strong.

Something a man is not.

One could learn from it too.

I'm cold.

There is a song my grandfather taught me to sing:

*The body perishes, the heart stays young
The platter wears away with serving food
No log retains its bark when old,
No lover peaceful while the rival weeps.*

Oh, my children! I never taught you that song. It's a song for the old and the dying, and I thought I would sing it for you when I grew old.

But now I won't. You'll never learn it. And you won't know that a man is not a man until he walks with a lion.

Soon everyone will forget that. And it's a thing that someone should remember.

Variation K: Juggernaut

Animato

(Animatedly)

Contact: November 2078

Recorded video-burst transmission from Dr. Shantia Mukerjee (Hydroponics Services, Heaven) to John Mukerjee (San Francisco, CA):

They tell me you haven't checked to see if I'm alive.

We've been under strict orders up here for the last few days, not to call friends and relatives to say we're all right. For the first few hours after the construction workers were killed, all the radio bands were clogged with people trying to get messages back home, interfering with emergency relief communications; so Laughing Dragon clamped down and said no outgoing calls. Incoming calls were taken by the main communications

center, and answered curtly: "Yes, she's alive and well." "No, we haven't located him yet."

You'd know this if you called. But you didn't. I suppose you were too busy getting injunctions against mining companies that want to despoil the pristine Martian landscape; your mother isn't environmentally relevant.

That's a cheap shot. I'm sorry.

Anyway, things are getting back to normal now. We're each being allowed one ten-minute transmission to anywhere in the solar system, all expenses paid by Laughing Dragon. And I wanted to tell you I'm safe, our hydroponics dome was nowhere near the accident, I didn't lose so much as a bean plant.

There. Well. I guess I still have nine minutes of free air time.

This is hard for me.

Look, John, there's something I want to tell you. Show you. It's important.

I'll just get the camera turned . . . okay. You're looking at one of the hydroponics chambers up here. Leaf lettuce on the right, radishes on the left. Good growth, I'm sure you can see that. We've built quite a sophisticated system, very productive. I know you look down on me because I'm growing salad for rich tourists when I could be feeding the poor, but really—Laughing Dragon has given us a substantial research budget. Some of the designs we've developed could improve the yield of hydroponics systems everywhere, make more food for everyone. . . .

I promised myself I wouldn't keep apologizing to you. I've done important work up here. I don't have to feel guilty that I'm not fighting drought in Africa. We can't all live up to your standards, John.

The plants you're looking at are normal strains, designed for Earth-normal gravity. I suppose you've read that Heaven's gravity is almost exactly that of Earth: within a few thousandths of a per cent of gravity at sea level on the equator. It's touted as the greatest engineering feat in the construction of Heaven: getting the right density and distribution of mass to mimic one Earth G, over almost the entire surface.

Well! You'll see.

Now I'm taking the camera into the next room. This is an experimental chamber—black-eyed peas biologically engineered for growth in the Luna colonies. Laughing Dragon lets each of us senior researchers conduct small personal experiments; we get publications out of it and Laughing Dragon basks in any resulting prestige. There's nothing wrong with that, it's no different in a university or a . . .

I'm apologizing again. Sorry.

All right, you can see that the peas are growing well. Good greenery, excellent pod production. I never expected anything like this. After all, these are low-gravity plants; I only set up this chamber because I wanted to experiment with the design of water delivery systems, and I never thought I'd get significant yields. You just shouldn't see this kind of growth under Earth-normal gravity.

Now, watch as I drop this pencil.

No, I didn't change the camera to slow motion. That's precisely the speed that things fall in this chamber. I haven't done any elaborate tests, but I'm fairly certain we have lunar gravity in here.

Needless to say, this is none of my doing. A month ago, I would have said it was impossible to have gravity like Earth in one room and Luna next door. But now let me go into the next chamber. I'll just . . . you can probably see the camera bouncing, because I'm bouncing as I walk. Have you ever been to the moon colonies, John? Walking in here is exactly like walking down the streets of Tycho. I suppose it would be fun, if it weren't so bewildering. And scary.

All right, through the hatch to the next room and . . . yes, I'm floating towards the ceiling. Weightless. I've got zero-G soybeans growing in this chamber—you know, engineered for non-spinning orbitals. Zero-G plants, zero-G chamber.

Believe me, the gravity here was Earth-normal two months ago. These beans could scarcely germinate. But over the course of a few days, the gravity dropped to nothing. Just dropped of its own accord. To precisely the level the plants found ideal.

It gives me the creeps, John. It did the first time and it still does now. I haven't told anyone about this, because it's too spooky to talk about.

Do you know what I think is happening? It's a feedback loop, between these plants and Heaven. Heaven is artificially controlling the gravity on every square millimeter of its surface, in accordance with the preferences of those affected. In here, the soybeans want it weightless. Out on the rest of the surface . . . well, I don't think it's an accident that the gravity is exactly what humans like it to be.

Laughing Dragon didn't engineer the gravity here; Heaven is doing this itself.

It gives me cold chills just thinking about it, John. Heaven can't be human-made. Humans don't how to play games with gravity. Humans don't know how to establish this kind of feedback communication with plants.

And I haven't told you yet about the dreams. More and more people up here are having vivid dreams . . . and coherent ones, not the usual sort of disjointed images. The dreams leave a lingering feeling of . . . I guess the word is spirituality. "Like touching the mind of God," one of the other researchers said this morning . . . which I'm sure you'll dismiss as maudlin sentimentality, but if you ever had one of these dreams yourself . . . a sort of quiet wonder . . .

No, I'm not going to tell you what I've dreamt about. I'm tired of you sneering at me.

But the point is, I don't think these dreams are just coincidence. This *thing* we're on, what Laughing Dragon calls Heaven—I don't know whether it's touching our minds or we're touching it, but if there's such a thing as telepathy with soybeans, why not with humans?

I don't sound much like a professional scientist, do I? No detachment. I can't feel detached when I'm constantly swinging between the extremes of fear and awe. Because even if this creature sends inspiring dreams and

nurtures our gardens, it killed dozens of people when it casually opened its wings.

It's like . . . do you know what the juggernaut is? I never tried to teach you the old ways but maybe your grandmother told you. The juggernaut is a wagon used to carry a huge statue of Krishna Jagannatha through the city of Puri during the Rathayatra festival. The wagon is gigantic—it takes several hundred people to drag it along. On one hand, the juggernaut is beautiful and serene: it's decorated with flowers and surrounded by pilgrims singing hymns, not to mention that it carries the statue of the compassionate Lord Krishna; but on the other hand, a huge crowd mills uncontrollably around the wagon and all too often, someone falls under the wheels. The juggernaut doesn't stop; it represents benevolence and good will, but it can leave crushed bodies in its wake.

Do you understand, John? Yes, I imagine you do. You're a juggernaut yourself, on occasion.

I've been trying to build up my courage to tell someone what I've found out. I'm sure you'd do it without a moment's hesitation: summon the media, make a statement, proclaim your moral outrage at what's going on. Decent. Criminal negligence. Cover-up.

But I'm no crusader. I'm just a woman who knows a secret.

And now you do too.

Help me, John. Call that prince, the one who's suing Laughing Dragon over the death of his workers. Say I'll testify. But keep my name secret, just for the time being. I still have a job up here with Laughing Dragon. I still have a reputation as a scientist, and if I start talking about artificial gravity, telepathy . . . I promise I'll take the witness stand when the time comes, but I don't want to declare war on Heaven just yet.

I want to stay here a little while longer. Even if it sometimes terrifies me.

I want to hold onto my dreams.

Variation L: White Elephant

Allegro pomposo

(At good speed, pompously)

Contact: December 2078

Excuse me, Miss, uh, Ms., uh, Verhooven. Is your father in?

This, uh, it's a business matter at the presidential level. Oh, no. No, it's not . . . of course, you're every bit the banker that your father is, but I think—

Yes, ma'am.

Yes, ma'am.

No, ma'am.

Well, it's related to Laughing Dragon Entertainment Industries. As you know, that company has loans with this bank well in excess of . . . uh, I have it written down . . . yes, ma'am, that's the figure I have here. Very good. You have an excellent memory, Miss, uh, ma'am.

At any rate, when our Harukis had that much invested in a firm, it is standard policy for us to . . . approach . . . someone on their staff and make arrangements to be informed if and when something of interest . . . we prefer not to use the term "spy," ma'am. It's a term that hasn't gained acceptance in traditional banking circles.

Certainly, I'll get to the point. Our, uhh, contact has informed us that Mr. and Mrs. Haruki are considered missing. Ma'am.

Three days.

Our contact thinks the Harukis may have decided to, uhh, fly into the sun.

Well, it isn't entirely unfounded, ma'am. On one previous occasion when Laughing Dragon's business was running into setbacks, it is believed that the Harukis set off sunward and—

Running into setbacks, ma'am. It isn't public knowledge, but the prince, you know, Prince, uhh, who's suing Laughing Dragon over the construction deaths—he seems to have come into some information. We aren't exactly sure what he knows but the word is that it's extremely powerful leverage that should . . . yes, we can try to find out. I'll write that down, shall I? Action Item One: find out what the prince knows.

Other setbacks, yes ma'am, I'm getting to them. Uhh, it seems the, uhh, construction teams have all evacuated.

Gone home, ma'am. All of them.

Our guess is that the prince told them something. Although maybe they just left on their own because of all the accidents. The accidents. Four since the original one that killed the prince's workers. Apparently there have been quakes on Heaven's surface which ruptured a number of domes . . . oh no, there's no suggestion of sabotage, it says here that Laughing Dragon security personnel investigated each incident with all the . . . of course, there was insurance. We *insist* on insurance.

Our own investigators, ma'am? Well, perhaps you don't, uhh, understand the level of security Mrs., uhh, Mr. Haruki has imposed on Heaven. No photographs, no close approach from space, no unauthorized visits from . . . good Lord, no, she wasn't trying to *hide* anything from us. How could she hide something from us? We audit her books every six months.

The security was because Mrs. Haruki was worried about terrorists. Terrorists, ma'am. Well, no, an amusement park one hundred and six million kilometers from Earth is not an *obvious* political target, but caution is always—

Oh, now, Miss Verhooven, uhh, Ms. . . . we've made a substantial number of investigations, yes, a substantial number, let me . . . oh . . . no . . . this is the, uhh . . . we call it the, uhh, nut file. From earlier inquiries. You recall that Laughing Dragon categorically refused to discuss how the body of Heaven was constructed? Well, we did some digging to find out . . . asked around on all the planets, did anyone see something huge and strange in space . . . well, we got some wild stories, ma'am, you'd be amused. No, there's nothing of interest here, I personally checked each and every . . . yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. I'll leave the file with you.

About the Harukis, ma'am . . . if they're, uhh, gone, there could be serious . . . well, I was talking to Legal, and they say if Laughing Dragon were to default on the loan, Heaven would, uhh . . . become ours.

The bank's.

Presumably we'd sell it to someone, ma'am.

There must be . . . uhh . . . I mean, it's a nice big, uhh . . . I should think there'd be a buyer somewhere, ma'am. All those energy cells, the scrap value alone . . . no, I don't think we've calculated the cost of reclamation. No, ma'am, I wouldn't be qualified to venture an opinion in that area, not at present. I'll make that another Action Item, shall I?

Maybe we'll just work up a full report on this, yes? I mean, Heaven's a great big . . . it's very big. There's always someone who'll buy something that's big. In my experience. Any time the bank has repossessed something before, we've never had any trouble selling it off . . . not when it was something, uhh, big.

No, ma'am. We didn't think ahead. We're sorry.

Variation M: Totem

Tranquillo con spirito

(Serenely, with spirit)

Contact: January 2079

The smoke rises to heaven.

The sound of the rattle rises to heaven.

Let my song rise to heaven,

For I have dreamed a true dream.

Come here, Celeste.

You're wondering what your animal will be, right?

When I was a boy your age, I wanted the shaman to tell me I had been chosen by the eagles. I dreamt of flying with them . . . or a bear; that seemed like a good animal too. I'd seen a bear once in a zoo—it seemed wise and kindly. Now that I know more about bears, I realize that I overlooked important aspects of the bear personality. Its claws, for example.

But no, your animal will not be the bear. Or the eagle. Or the wolf or the whale or any of those totems that young people usually hope for.

I know. You're disappointed. I was disappointed when the shaman told me my bed would lie in the rabbit lodge. I wanted to be . . . oh, something more heroic. I thought rabbits were timid and foolish. But really, when a rabbit runs from a fox, it isn't being foolish, is it? And a rabbit has the heart of a wolverine at times—when being brave isn't foolish. A rabbit is always watching, always listening, always sniffing the air. That's a good way for a shaman to live.

But no, you won't be a rabbit either.

The spirits have built a new lodge. They've sensed a new creature. Not human, not an animal they've known in the past. It comes from far away. This animal is your totem.

I don't know its name. You're the first of its clan. It has no name in any human tongue. You can ask for its secret name when you meet it.

To meet it, you'll have to journey off-planet. At present, the creature is several million kilometers inside the orbit of Mercury, and—

No, I'm not crazy. Or lying. The animals spoke. I dreamed a true dream.

Are you saying the truth is only true when you can understand it?

You're wrong.

When I went to university many decades ago, I enrolled in mathematics because I wanted to tell truth from falsehood. I believed that mathematics was the one pure source of truth because it was the only discipline entirely divorced from subjectivity. But that was before I began studying. At school, I learned that all mathematics starts with, "Let us pretend this is true and see where it leads." That is mathematics' great joy and strength: it dares to stand on nothingness. It dares to see that it's standing on nothingness, yet it's still brave. Can you tell me its magic isn't strong?

You want to argue with me, I see that. Don't you want to be a shaman, Celeste? Don't you want to have magic in your heart? Well, I'll tell you a secret about magic: it refuses to be what you want it to be. Demand something of magic and it will choose to be something else.

One quiet wintry Sunday while I was at the university, I woke at dawn and went for a walk. I suppose you'd like me to give some mystic explanation for walking at that hour, but the truth is, my roommate was snoring so loudly I couldn't sleep, so I got angry and left. I walked nowhere in particular, and because I was angry, I paid little attention to the world around me: the cardinals whistling in the trees, the squirrels running across the snow. I was in no magical mood, I assure you.

But as I passed one of the university parking lots, I saw a spirit.

It was the Thunderbird, I think: a man's body, with the head of a bird of prey. It was at the far end of the lot, walking away from me towards the science complex; I could only see its back, a long distance off.

I stood frozen for two full minutes until the spirit disappeared behind the chemistry building.

Now, girl, was that magic?

The spirit was a long way off and in the shadow of some buildings. It could have been nothing more than someone wearing an odd hat. I tried to convince myself I was imagining things, because the incident didn't fit with how I thought the world should work. Why would a great spirit be walking across a parking lot? A parking lot! Not a field, not a forest, a parking lot. And if a spirit chose to show itself to me, why didn't it talk or do something miraculous? Why would it just walk away and disappear?

Was that magic? Or was it only my imagination?

Since then I've met the Thunderbird several times in my dreams of the Other World, but it has always refused to say whether it really showed itself to me that day.

That's the way of true magic, Celeste. It's slippery. It's always open to question. My dreams of the Other World, well, maybe they're just dreams, right? There's always a logical explanation somewhere if you want it.

And there's always magic if you want it. Everywhere. In the forest, in the city, in a lodge, in a factory. In space, several million kilometers inside the orbit of Mercury.

That's the magic you've been offered. You don't get a choice what your magic will be; your choice is whether you will let it be magic.

Will you?

Yes, we can get you there. A woman named Verhooven is bringing people to see the new creature. She has become curious about it and is gathering those with knowledge of its travels. It won't be hard for you to join this group. You belong to the creature's clan; you have to speak for it. The spirits will make sure you get where you belong.

Are you willing to accept this magic, young shaman? Are you willing to say, "Let's pretend this is true and see where it leads?"

Then let the drums sound.

The music of the drums rises to Heaven.

Fugue: Organism

Allegro con tutti

(At good speed, with the entire orchestra)

Contact: March 2079

According to the laws of the League of Peoples, the boundary of a single-sun solar system is that set of points where the gravitational attraction of the primary exactly equals the gravitational attraction of the rest of the universe. Humans might claim that determining this line is impossible, maybe even in violation of quantum physics; but the laws of the League have taken precedence over the laws of science for so long that science no longer contests the issue.

A few meters outside the boundary of Sol's system, the Outpost prepared for action. Sensors had recorded a steady increase in the Organism's mass over the past months as it drank in Sol's energy; within minutes, the Organism would have enough energy to open a wormhole out of the system. Wormholes were a haphazard way to travel—the hole's outlet might open as much as a light-year off target—but species without true FTL flight found wormholes a convenient shortcut whenever they wanted to leapfrog a parsec or two.

Of course, wormholes also had an unfortunate tendency to suck in every particle of matter for kilometers around. . . .

The Outpost of the League of Peoples watched and waited. The odds were good that humans would become an interstellar race much sooner than they expected.

[Leviathan] On the surface of Heaven, the environment domes and dormitory pods were slowly being shaken

apart by twitches in the Organism's skin; but a new dormitory had been built in space, some five kilometers distant. In this dormitory's cafeteria, Colleen O'Neil stood before a giant viewscreen, watching a crack grow across the surface of one of Heaven's domes as the creature shrugged. Colleen had no idea which heavenly environment was dying . . . Valhalla, perhaps, crumbling into Götterdämmerung. Good riddance.

She hated the sight of her grandfather's magnificent Leviathan reduced to this decrepit clout. But at the farthest ranges of vision, she could see the creature's wings spread wide to the sun: a clear clean black, darker than the night sky behind them. Valhalla and Nirvana and the Suh-Boat Fun ride were just barnacles on Leviathan's hide; they'd be scraped off soon enough.

[Nessie] Stitch Ashworth entered the cafeteria and nearly left again immediately. The only other person there was a fellow Martian, but dressed in laborer's khaki, her red hair braided with the gritty twine that miners called sand-string. Stitch's family were Olympians, residents of the heights of Olympus Mons, where the corporate executives lived. As a boy he'd been beaten up by miners' children whenever he ventured out of the Olympian safe areas; he had become a pilot to get away from the mines, the miners, and everyone else associated with the desolation of Mars.

The woman must have heard him come in, for she turned around and nodded without smiling. "Hello."

"H'lo," he answered carefully. "Anything doing out?" "Heaven is warring with itself," she said. "The idols are crashing down."

"Oh." He looked out at the wreckage shuddering across the surface. A concrete tower toppled soundlessly across a cluster of roller-coaster tracks. The windows in the distant tower's observation deck shattered; the air inside burst outward, its humidity turning to a spray of white. Stitch couldn't remember if the white was steam because of the low pressure or frost because of the cold. "Wild, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes," said the woman, sounding very satisfied.

"I was thinking of driving down," Stitch said suddenly, surprising himself as much as the muscular woman at the viewscreen. "I'm licensed for mini-shuttles, and there are dozens in the docking bay. I'd like to see . . ." But there was something too intense in her expression to let him tell the truth: that he was hoping to find some huge chalk letters that his grandfather had scribbled decades earlier. "I'd like to see it close up," he said.

The woman looked down at the surface again. She seemed to be smiling at the continuing destruction. "I'd like to see it close up, too."

[Angel] Dr. Simon Esteban met two of his fellow passengers in the corridor: Martians, both of them, a laborer built like a she-bear and a shy dandy. No, he corrected himself, it was wrong to pigeonhole people so quickly. As soon as a psychiatrist labeled a patient, he started treating the label instead of the person.

Esteban had said that to himself so often it was like a

mantra. Jogging around the track at the gym, he sometimes caught himself muttering, "Treat the person, not the label," over and over and over and over.

"We're going for a closer look at the surface," the she-bear said. "Interested?"

"Certainly," Esteban said, smiling his professional smile. In fact, he had heard that vicious quakes rocked the surface from time to time, scattering rubble into the air. Getting too close was dangerous . . . but his first patient, Rachel, had hesitated to approach her angel and she had gone mad.

No, he corrected himself. She had succumbed to delusional paranoia brought about by unresolved guilt.

No, he corrected himself again. She had gone mad.

[Bogey] In the docking bay, Jenny Harrington slid into the shadows of an inactive mini-shuttle storage tube as soon as she heard approaching footsteps. Not that Jenny was afraid to be caught here—Ms. Verhooven had said guests could go wherever they liked. But Jenny didn't want to talk to anyone now, didn't want to go through the pointless ritual of making conversation with strangers. In her hand was a bouquet of daisies, hard-grown in Mars's sterile soil . . . well, to be honest, grown in spite of Mars's soil, because it had been necessary to add so much: fertilizer, water, several strains of bacteria.

Jenny didn't want any of Verhooven's other guests to see the flowers in her hand. They had all heard her story. They'd think she was going to drop the flowers on the spot where her father had died because she loved him. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Her father had been a militaristic blockhead who died trying to kill some harmless hulk . . . and it was all pointless, wasn't it, because the hulk was still here and all that was left of her father was a dent in the hulk's side. Love was for people who deserved it, and her father had never ever deserved it.

The flowers were an exorcism, nothing more. A way to close off the past, once and for all.

Three people passed her hiding place and entered another mini-shuttle tube. Soon the blast door shut and the mini blasted off.

Jenny clutched her flowers fiercely and headed for the next active shuttle.

[Daemon] Gregor Petrozowski did nothing as the first shuttle emerged from the dormitory. His yacht stood off from the Organism, several kilometers sunward; he could see everything, with little chance of being detected himself, just a fleck in the fireball's face. When the second shuttle took off, the old man gave his computer a single soft command. "Down."

The sound of the sun was loud static over his radio speakers. In his years of isolation, he had developed a distaste both for music and the human voice. Staying in contact with humanity had been *impure*, in a way he couldn't explain. If he was to become worthy to rediscover his daemon, he had to cut himself off from the mundane world. Now, the only voice he could stand was the sun's.

Obviously, other people had discovered the daemon while he was searching alone in space. They had tried to build something on it—temples, maybe; he couldn't tell now that everything was lying in ruins. If he'd been listening to human broadcasts, he would have come here much earlier.

But he was here now. He had found the daemon, unaided, in the vast depths of space. And he could feel in his bones that he had arrived just in time.

"Down," he whispered. "Down."

[Boojum] "That's Petrozowski's yacht," Emil Mayous told his son Yorgi. "Petrozowski himself."

The boy hauled himself off his acceleration couch with a great ripping of velcro and floated over to the viewscreen. "Yacht looks like shit," he said after a moment's inspection.

The boy Yorgi thought he was an expert on yachts now that he owned one himself. Emil didn't want to know where the boy got enough money to buy the ship. Emil hadn't wanted to come to Heaven either, but Yorgi thought the Verhooven woman might pay big money to hear about his father's boojum hunt.

"Petrozowski's probably been in space ever since he abandoned the company," Yorgi said. "I bet he hasn't—Jesus Christ!"

A jet-black wing suddenly swept past the viewscreen like a flapping chunk of night. Proximity alarms blared throughout the ship.

"You stupid flea!" Emil shouted at his son, for no reason except his fear.

[Titan] The last maxi-shuttle to Heaven was en route to the main dormitory when the Organism lifted its wings to full height. Suddenly, the shuttle found itself in a trough six kilometers deep, the walls and floor so black they were nearly invisible. Overhead, the wide face of the sun burned down into the chasm; but it was far, far away, like a glimpse of sky to a child trapped in a well.

"Ooooo," said Beatrice Mallio, age four.

"Wow," said Benedict Mallio, age five.

"Something nice on the viewscreen?" their mother asked. Like the other adults on board, Juliet Mallio was tired of looking outside after days of travel; but she dutifully prepared herself to admire whatever piece of space debris her children were watching now.

Her eyes widened as she saw the deep black of the Organism's skin towering over both sides of the ship, the wings forming massive walls of starless night. At first she thought the shuttle had entered some sort of landing bay; but as she watched, dim flecks of blue-tinged light flickered into life against the blackness.

"Pretty!" said Beatrice.

"Like electric spiders!" said Benedict.

And they did look like spiders, skittering out of their nests and racing across the surface of both wings. The spiders danced madly, collided with each other, coalesced . . . and suddenly one leapt across the gap between the wings, trailing a pale thread of lightning directly in front of the shuttle. Without thinking, Juliet

stamped down with her foot, as if she had a brake pedal at that could stop the ship from flying through the lightning. The shuttle's pilot must have had reflexes equally quick, for the ship suddenly dipped, just managing to slip under the glowing thread.

All over the cabin, people gasped or cried out at the ship's sudden maneuver; but Juliet remained tensely silent, her eyes on the screen, her arms reaching out to wrap around her children's shoulders.

More and more of the lightning-threads sparked from one wing to another, weaving a net, a web across the trough. There was no way the pilot could avoid them all. One thread whipped against the shuttle's hull, and for a moment the viewscreen image twisted into jagged distortion; but a moment later, the picture snapped back into focus with an audible crackle. Another lightning strike, another crackle, a third, a fourth; then a fountain of light gushed crimson and the viewscreen went dead.

"Children," said Juliet Mallio, "are your safety belts very snug? Yes, make sure, let me check. Good. Good. A kiss for each of you. That's nice. Oh, yes, that's very nice. Now it's too bad that the pretty show has gone off the screen, but maybe you'd like a story instead. Yes? Maybe a story about a Titan." The shuttle veered sharply upward. "A Titan named Prometheus. A sad story, but a brave one."

The shuttle rocked like a cradle under an impatient hand.

"Ready? Once upon a time . . ."

[Dragon] Sunward, the Harukis looked back for a final time on their dragon. The wings were now pulled so far forward that it seemed as if the Laughing Dragon of Heaven had reshaped itself into a cavernous mouth and its breath was a rainbow of fire.

"A true dragon," said Yushio, awestruck.

"It always has been," his wife answered.

"Change course, change course!" Yushio shouted to their yacht's navigation computer. "Into the dragon's mouth!"

For a moment, Mrs. Haruki considered countermanding the order. But when she saw the exhilaration on her husband's face, the joy of jumping into something new and exciting, she held her silence. The sun, the dragon, never mind.

She took Yushio's hand and squeezed fondly.

[Roc] Two seats behind the Mallio family inside the maxi-shuttle, the prince unbuckled his safety belt, then staggered up the aisle and dragged open the hatch that separated the cockpit from the passenger cabin. The pilot shouted at him to get back and sit down, but the prince ignored the woman; he refused to die meekly, blind to what was happening and strapped into a comfortable chair.

Through the tinted cockpit port, the prince could see that the pilot had angled the shuttle upward, trying to climb out of the trough made by the Organism's wings; but the web of energy weaving itself across the chasm was acting like a physical obstruction, tangling around

the ship's nose, dragging it down. Red lights flashed on the control panel; new ones lit every second.

There was no sound but the cursing of the pilot, and a frightened babbling back in the cabin. But beneath his feet, the prince could feel the floor beginning to vibrate.

Trying to balance against the rocking of the ship, he knelt beside the pilot and said in a low voice, "I'm a trained engineer. Tell me what I can do to help you."

"Can you cross your fingers and pray?" she asked angrily.

"The first thing an engineer learns," he told her.

[Lion] In the passenger cabin of the shuttle, Elizabeth Obasa hugged her children and whispered to them not to cry. "Listen," she said, "I had a dream. When I was sleeping a little while ago. About your father.

"He was walking across a dark grassland at night, and wherever I looked there was an animal there, watching him: a bull, a bear, a swan, all kinds of animals.

"As I watched, he walked up to a goat and said, 'I'm looking for a lion.'

"The goat said, 'I'm a lion.' So they walked a little distance and they talked about how beautiful their children looked when they were asleep.

"Then he walked up to a fine winged horse and said, 'I'm looking for a lion.'

"The horse said, 'I'm a lion.' So they walked a little distance and they talked about how beautiful their children sounded when they laughed.

"Then he walked up to me and said, 'I'm looking for a lion.'

"I said, 'I'm a lion.' So we walked a little distance to a little grove where your children were playing and climbing trees. And your father said, 'So many lions!'"

A burst of blinding blue roared out from the door to the cockpit and the cabin lights blinked out.

[Juggernaut] The cabin lay silent and dark, lit only by a faint glow coming from the cockpit. Slowly, Shanta Mukerjee eased her grip on the arms of her seat; she had been clinging so tightly that her knuckles cracked softly as they relaxed. She desperately wanted all the trouble to go away, for this to be yet another dream sent by the Juggernaut. But she knew this was real. And the blast of light from the cockpit suggested a fire, an explosion, something like that.

Her son John would never forgive her for cowering in her seat when the pilot might be in trouble.

Hesitantly, she lifted open the release on her safety belt. Her first motion sent her drifting towards the cabin roof, bumping off and heading floorward again. It was almost funny—at one time she would have been completely disoriented by being weightless, but thanks to some soybeans, she was quite accustomed to it by now.

She could easily pull herself forward by grabbing at the edge of the overhead luggage compartments. A few of her fellow travelers were beginning to make panicked noises in the darkness. "It's all right," she said loudly. "It's just that the engines have shut off, so we're all weightless. Stay where you are and I'll check with the pilot."

She hoped she sounded cool and confident. John would look down on her forever if she couldn't keep people calm in a crisis.

The light in the cockpit area was starlight coming through the front port: the hard sharp starlight of vacuum. The sun was not in sight, and overhead, the body of the Juggernaut was a vast blackness against the Milky Way. Its wings had once again tucked back against its body; its fireworks were over.

By the starlight, Shanta could see the pilot still belted into her chair, her face and hands black with burns. Shanta put her hand to the pilot's neck; no pulse. Electrocutation from the control panel? Shanta couldn't imagine the size of a power surge that would kill a human being faster than fuses could blow.

But still. The pilot was dead.

On the opposite side of the cockpit, the prince's body was drifting, nudging against the side viewing port. He too had been caught in the power surge, but his burns were less severe. Shanta could feel no pulse in his throat either, but she couldn't just hover here staring at two dead bodies without doing something.

Shanta pushed the prince's body down to the floor, and tried to give CPR. Weightlessness made it almost impossible: when she pressed on his chest, she drifted towards the roof. She managed to prop her shoulder under the pilot's chair to get some leverage, then began again. Patiently. Unstopably.

[White Elephant] Margaret Verhooven floated to the door of the maxi-shuttle cockpit. She could see the dead pilot, and Shanta Mukerjee trying to revive the prince. She could also see other ships outside: two mini-shuttles and three yachts. The shuttles were stenciled with the name of her bank, but the yachts were unfamiliar.

Verhooven scanned the sky for some indication of where she was. Against the swath of untwinkling stars, one star stood out from the rest, brighter than any planet seen from Earth. The star was yellow. It was either the sun too far away, or another star too close up.

The Outpost of the League of Peoples suddenly appeared below the shuttle, seeming to materialize from nowhere: a huge habitat bigger than any orbital or space-wheel, its brilliantly white skin surrounded by a milky envelope of particles agitated by its arrival. Teleportation? Verhooven asked herself silently. Or just moving so fast I didn't see it come? And what the hell is it?

The Outpost began to ascend slowly. Looking at the stark white Outpost below and the jet-black Organism above, Verhooven had the image of being crushed between giant salt and pepper shakers. She stifled a laugh before it threatened to become hysterical.

When the Outpost nudged up against the shuttle, Verhooven felt only a tiny bump below her feet. She floated downward as the Outpost continued to ascend, pushing the shuttle with it. With one hand, she grabbed the edge of the cabin door and pulled herself back up to keep a clear view out the cockpit port.

One by one, the other ships made contact with the ascending Outpost and were caught in its upward push.

They were not far apart to begin with, all sucked through the same small wormhole and spat out at the same point; now, gentle nudges from the Outpost clumped them closer together, until they were bumping each other lightly like rowboats tied to the same ring on a dock. (Verhooven thought about when her father had taken her fishing. The only time. She was eight years old, and for some reason he thought she hadn't enjoyed herself. Whenever she asked if she could go with him on another trip, he thought she was being polite. Or sarcastic. Through her whole life, no one had ever been able to tell when she was sincere.)

She told herself that the white giant beneath them would really crush the ships against Heaven above; but when the gap was almost closed, the Outpost stopped pushing and let the ships drift the rest of the way to Heaven's surface. For a moment nothing happened but a gentle bump. Then, without hurry, gravity imposed itself: gravity from the Organism overhead, making the shuttle's roof into a floor.

Verhooven had ample time to reorient herself. Across the cabin, she saw Shanta Mukerjee cradling the prince's body as the world reversed. The prince was breathing weakly.

Behind Verhooven's back, the cockpit entry hatch slid open. Adrenaline shot into Verhooven's blood, and she dragged in a huge breath, expecting the ship's atmosphere to gush out into vacuum; but there was no wind, nor the sudden cold of space. A warm breeze blew in through the hatch, smelling as pleasant as a sunny hillside. She remembered the smell from the two weeks she and her father had spent at a mountain resort in the Rockies. They'd never done that again, either.

Verhooven found she had tears in her eyes.

[Totem] Celeste Dumont was the first person to leave the shuttle. She walked slowly down the gangway, trying to memorize every sensation as she set foot on her totem's skin. The eyes of its scales tracked her as she moved. She knelt and held her hand out close to the surface, the same way she would let a dog smell her when she met it for the first time. The eyes focused on her, drank in her body heat.

Behind her, other passengers came slowly out of the shuttle, and farther off, people emerged from the other ships that lay on the surface. Some talked excitedly; others seemed to be struck dumb. Celeste remained silent and tried to hear a deeper voice.

When the babble of human voices became too distracting, she moved away from them, coming at last to a hatchway in the side of a large black bulge in the Organism's skin. The hatch slid open at her touch, revealing an airlock. She went inside, closed the outer door, opened the inner.

Celeste found herself in a place of quiet greenery. A well-tended Japanese temple stood before her, and somewhere inside it a flute was playing. As she followed the sound of the music, a wild joy filled her heart, tightening her chest, burning through her whole body: the taste of magic, the sensation of truly not knowing what might be abroad in the world, yet racing eagerly to meet it.

[Organism] The Envoy of the League of Peoples sat in a bamboo chair beside the temple's altar, his heart filled with the same kind of fierce excitement. He had lost track of how many human lifetimes he had waited for this moment . . . although he was human himself, very human. Could a being live centuries and still be truly human? Yes. Yes.

If he couldn't calm himself by playing his flute, he felt as if his heart would batter its way out of his chest.

A woman entered the sanctuary, nearly running, her face shining. He lowered his flute and smiled self-consciously. He was sure she would be disappointed to see a very ordinary man here; but there was no disappointment on her face.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello," she answered, a bit out of breath. "Do you know anything about this . . . creature we're standing on?"

"I've been watching it a long time. From the Outpost. The big white thing." He laughed. "I've been watching everything a long time. Hello."

"Yes. Hello."

"The League of Peoples wrote me a speech to welcome humanity as new citizens of the universe," he said, "but it's very pompous. I'd be embarrassed to deliver it at the moment. If you people invite me back to Earth, I'm sure I'll have plenty of public speaking engagements. I can be pompous then. So . . . just hello."

She smiled brilliantly, and his heart beat even harder. He had never met another human. He could not believe how magnificent humans could be. He wanted to see them all, touch them, embrace them, this woman, the others outside, a solar system full of them.

O, wonder, he thought, how many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in't.

An allusion to a human celebration text. His mentor would be proud.

"This creature . . ." the woman said to him, pointing downward. "Do you know its name?"

"I just call it the Organism."

She nodded as if she found the name perfect. "It's my totem," she said. "I've finally found my totem."

He smiled, and told her, "So have I." ♦

AMAZING[®] STORIES

Back Issues: The list is shrinking

The AMAZING[®] Stories "garage sale" that began five issues ago, with an announcement in the December magazine, has been pretty popular. Practically all of the back issues that were in short supply to begin with are sold out.

But even if you're seeing this list for the first time, you still have a chance to pick up some issues of the magazine from the 1960s and 1970s at prices that we think are very reasonable. On the following two pages is a list of what we have left, arranged chronologically.

The list also includes six paperback anthologies that were produced by TSR, Inc., in 1985 through 1987, reprinting many classic stories from older issues—a great way to pick up a representative collection of what was being printed in the good old days.

All of the anthologies and most of the magazines are in mint condition. Among the copies of any particular issue, the magazines in mint condition are being sold first, so the sooner you place an order, the better the condition of the issues you'll receive. Every magazine carries a money-back guarantee—if you aren't satisfied with the condition of what you receive, or if your order isn't what you expected for any other reason, send us the merchandise you don't want and we'll reimburse you for the price of the item(s) plus the return postage.

Magazine prices vary according to age, with the older issues costing less than the newer ones (because the cover price of the older magazines was lower). Each group of issues carries a price at the head of that section.

After you've totaled the prices for the magazines you want, add on a postage charge of \$1.00 for the first issue and 50¢ for each addi-

tional issue up through the tenth one. If your order is for more than 10 magazines, you don't pay any additional postage charge.

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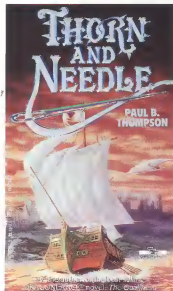
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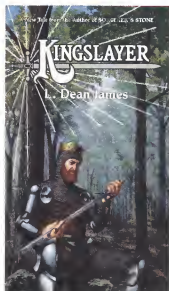
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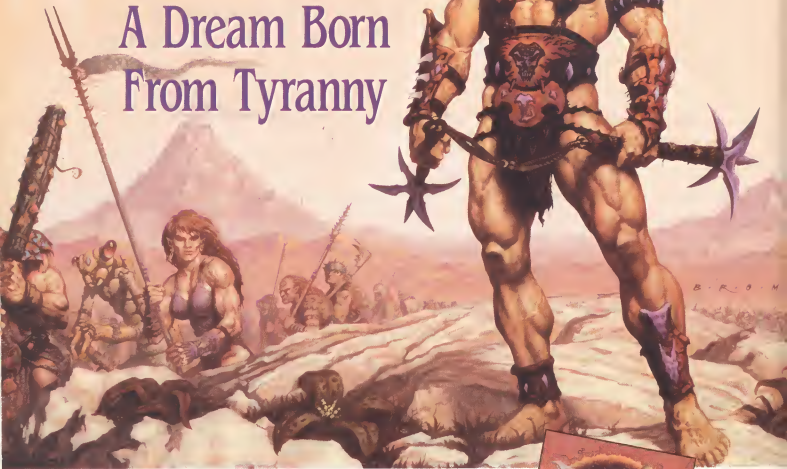
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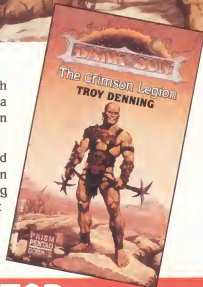
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